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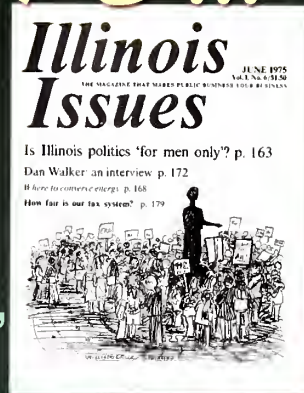
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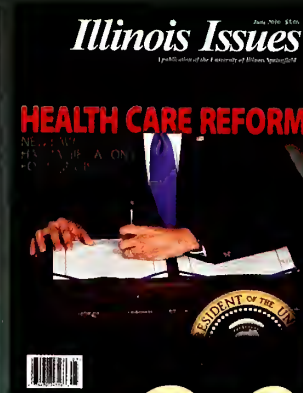
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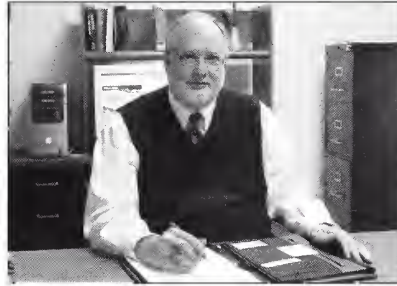
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Dana Heupel



Fewer voters are willing to make sacrifices for the good of all

by Dana Heupel

The other day, a Springfield radio talk show host related his recent visit to a new public high school in Waterloo. He told listeners that his other job, working in traffic safety for state government, had taken him to the former high school in the Metro East city several times over the years.

The difference in the atmosphere of the new school building, which opened last August, was palpable. The decaying former high school had exuded tension, said the radio host, who is a former public school teacher. The new one is bright and inviting and radiates a positive environment for learning.

Voters in 2006 had passed a referendum to build the new \$35 million high school. The radio host, an acknowledged Republican, admitted that he generally doesn't support tax increases but concluded that this school is an example of public money wisely used.

That's how our system of self-government is supposed to work: Citizens determine a need, and they willingly make sacrifices to fill it. Sadly, though, the radio host and school district voters are apparently in the

More and more often, voters are unwilling to increase any government spending. But they also object to reducing government services.

minority. In the February primary elections, 12 referendums to increase school taxes or bonding indebtedness across Illinois failed, while only eight passed, according to *ballotpedia.org*, which analyzed documents from the General Assembly and State Board of Elections. In the April 2009 consolidated elections, 10 failed and six passed.

But it's not just schools. More and more often, voters are unwilling to increase any government spending.

But they also object to reducing government services. Polls released during the past year by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University bear that out:

Last fall, a statewide survey by the institute determined that 56.5 percent of Illinoisans believed Illinois' state budget troubles could be solved by cutting government waste. Of the remaining respondents, 27.3 percent said a combination of cuts and tax increases was the answer, while only 9.5 supported a tax increase alone.

But when asked in the same poll where to make sacrifices, 84.7 percent objected to cuts in K-12 education, 61.4 percent were against cuts in colleges and public universities, 79.8 percent opposed cuts in public safety, 63 percent didn't want cuts in natural resources programs, 72.4 percent said no to cuts in programs for poor people, 85.3 percent disagreed with cuts to programs for people with mental or physical disabilities. Even 53.4 percent resisted cuts in pension benefits for state employees, while 39.5 percent favored that approach.

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In other words, although more than half of those polled believed in general that cuts to state government are the solution to the \$13 billion budget deficit, when asked about specific cuts, they overwhelmingly rejected all of them.

OK, then. Maybe cuts in government services aren't the answer. Then the other solution is to increase state revenue. Right?

Wrong. Only 32.1 percent of poll respondents supported raising the state income tax from 3 percent to 4.5 percent. Only 21.4 percent favored increasing the state sales tax. Applying the sales tax to services such as haircuts fared a little better but still only garnered 44.1 percent support. About the same percentage, 44.5, favored expanding legal gambling, and only 25.9 percent thought selling state assets would be a good idea.

A Simon Institute survey in April that polled only registered voters in southern Illinois produced similar results. They supported cuts in general (60.1 percent) but overwhelmingly opposed specific cuts, as well as tax increases and expanded gambling.

As I write this, state lawmakers and Gov. Pat Quinn are still wrestling over a budget for the next fiscal year, but it's pretty clear that — for now, at least — it won't include many specific service cuts or tax increases. Our elected officials are taking a lot of heat — and deservedly so — for putting their own political interests ahead of the needs of Illinois citizens. Courage is in short supply right now in the Capitol, and there's an overabundance of political posturing and self-preservation.

But an argument could be made that our elected representatives are simply embodying the wishes of their constituents. That the voters they represent have indeed indicated that they want chaos and fumbling and flip-flopping. After all, what's a politician to do when placed in a no-win situation? The only realistic options are to avoid or postpone any decision that will bring certain trouble.

Illinois voters aren't alone in their indecision. In California, the only

state in worse financial shape, a Field Poll in March showed voter support for cuts only in correctional facilities (56 percent) and parks and recreation programs (52 percent). And the majorities in those two areas only emerged when that state's financial crisis reached epic proportions. In 2008, when the problems first became evident, none of the 12 state government areas suggested for cuts garnered support from half of those polled.

"I read most of the major polls routinely," John Jackson, a visiting political science professor at the Simon Institute, told *Chicago Tribune* columnist Eric Zorn in April. "And my long-term reading of those polls certainly seems to indicate that we want it all while damning the government and taxes."

Most everyone agrees that "civic engagement" is one way to combat the public policy problems facing America. Cited as a definition of that term on the *New York Times*' website is a paragraph from *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*, edited by Thomas Ehrlich:

"A morally and civically responsible individual recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger social fabric and therefore considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own; such an individual is willing to see the moral and civic dimensions of issues, to make and justify informed moral and civic judgments, and to take action when appropriate."

But what happens when individuals are aware of problems and simply choose to ignore their responsibility to solve them? Can we expect elected representatives to act decisively without understanding the clear will of their constituents?

State politicians should be held accountable for their actions, as well as for their inaction. But they're not entirely — maybe not even mostly — to blame.

Perhaps, as the comic strip character Pogo famously observed, "We have met the enemy, and he is us." □

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June 2010



Higher standards, page 24



Health care reform, page 17

Volume XXXVI, No. 6



Telecom rewrite, page 31

FEATURES

17 Health care reform

New law has ramifications for Illinoisans.

by Dean Olsen

21 Q&A

Gov. Pat Quinn and Sen. Bill Brady

by Jamey Dunn

24 Higher standards

Illinois education leaders favor adoption of new national education goals.

by Maura Kelly Lannan

28 Rural relief

Federal stimulus money sent to smaller towns creates jobs that have an immediate impact on local economies.

by Beverley Scobell

31 Telecom rewrite

Lawmakers unanimously approve legislation to bring regulation up to speed.

by Rachel Wells

DEPARTMENTS

3 EDITOR'S NOTE

Fewer voters willing to sacrifice

by Dana Heupel

6 STATE OF THE STATE

Jobs not always No. 1 concern

by Jamey Dunn

8 BRIEFLY

34 PEOPLE

36 LETTERS

37 ENDS AND MEANS

Legislature leaves without budget.

by Charles N. Wheeler III

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Dana Heupel

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Jamey Dunn



Lawmakers should use caution when considering job creation plans

by Jamey Dunn

Gov. Pat Quinn and state Sen. Bill Brady have made it clear that they see job creation as the No. 1 issue in their race for the governor's office. In a state with an unemployment rate of more than 11 percent, it is pretty safe to say that joblessness is a top concern of many voters, too.

The legislature tackled the issue during its spring session and tossed around some contentious proposals under the tag line of job creation. Lawmakers aired concerns about environmental protection, security, tax revenue and consumer protection, while weighing the need for new jobs against effects that mechanisms for job creation might have on the future of the state.

The highest profile debate over what many saw as a jobs issue came after President Barack Obama's administration agreed to buy the Thomson Correctional Center in December with the intention of using it to house suspected terrorists after the planned closure of the Guantanamo Bay detention center. The prison was completed in 2001 and has sat relatively empty since. It is in Carroll County, which has an unemployment rate of almost 15 percent.

Republicans, including Brady, voiced concerns that the deal lacked transparency and said the prison should be used to alleviate overcrowding in Illinois' corrections system. Many said they were worried about the security implications

"Properties worth more than \$1 million, like the Thomson Correctional Center, should not be sold in the dead of night by administrative procedure but in the light of day with legislative approval."

Rep. Michael Tryon

of locking up suspected al-Qaeda members in the state.

"How bad is it in Illinois? Our economic development program consists of relocating terrorists," joked Dan Proft, who was then a Republican candidate for governor.

It has since become uncertain whether former Guantanamo detainees will be moved to Illinois. The president's January deadline for closing the facility has long passed. However, the Obama administration has said it would still use Thomson as a federal prison, no matter what the final outcome is for locating the detainees.

Rep. Jim Sacia, a Pocatonia Republican, says arguments about overcrowding should not stop Illinois from selling Thomson. He says he has tried for the eight years he has been in office to

get the prison opened in some capacity to bring jobs to his area. "If we couldn't afford to open it then, don't you dare get on your high horse and tell me we can afford to open it today."

Sen. Dave Syverson from Rockford was one of the few Republican voices joining Sacia. He adamantly opposes the closure of Guantanamo and the plan to move the prisoners to the U.S. mainland. However, he says if it is going to happen, Illinois should take advantage of the situation to bring jobs to an economically depressed area of the state.

The House passed **House Bill 4744** in February, which would require Quinn to get legislative approval if he wants to sell any facility worth more than \$1 million. "Properties worth more than \$1 million, like the Thomson Correctional Center, should not be sold in the dead of night by administrative procedure but in the light of day with legislative approval," says the bill's sponsor, Republican Rep. Michael Tryon of Crystal Lake.

Sen. James Meeks, a Chicago Democrat, argued near the close of session in favor of another controversial plan that he hopes would bring jobs to the hard-hit village of Ford Heights, a Cook County suburb with an unemployment rate of 29 percent. The measure, which would categorize burning tires for fuel as a source of renewable energy, has many detractors.

Defining tires as a source of renewable power would help a local tire incinerator owned by Geneva Energy to obtain grants and low-interest loans now only offered to traditionally sustainable sources such as wind and solar power. It would also put the plant in competition as Illinois power companies seek more “green” energy to fulfill a requirement that 25 percent of their power comes from renewable sources by 2025. The president and chief executive officer of the plant, Ben Rose, says the reclassification may keep it from closing down.

“We have been operating this plant for the last five years. Nothing changes according to this bill except for a definition. We can now, under this bill if it becomes law, define what we’re doing as renewable energy,” says Meeks, whose district contains the village. “The people down in Ford Heights, we really need this because businesses are leaving, and the last thing we need to do is have another business or plant leave Ford Heights.”

Supporters also say the plant destroys tires that would otherwise go to landfills or fill with rainwater to become a breeding ground for mosquitoes that could carry West Nile virus.

But many just can’t swallow the idea of giving renewable energy status to a plant that the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency has cited for air pollution violations four times since 2006. The House passed the bill, but the Senate voted it down.

“I certainly would like to help the village of Ford Heights. ... But in saying this bill doesn’t do anything other than change the definition — that’s exactly what it does. It changes a very important definition. It defines the burning of tires as a renewable energy. ... That is not renewable energy. I understand the impetus. I understand the importance of economic development ... but the method here is wrong,” says Sen. Don Harmon, an Oak Park Democrat.

Sen. William Delgado, a Chicago Democrat, says the state should seek to create and encourage cutting-edge energy generation instead of creating incentives for polluting. “Illinois should be moving forward and creating new economies, especially in workforce development in the south. ... I want this to stir a conversation of innovation.”

Legislators must scrutinize development or regulatory proposals that involve a large trade-off, and many plans do. They must weigh the needs of communities against any long-term benefits or damages, perhaps even more so during times when areas desperate for development make prime targets for those who might seek to cash in on their hardship.

An issue directly related to job creation originally proposed last legislative session is back this year for another round. Sales Tax Revenue Bonds, or STAR bonds, first surfaced as a plan to finance a large shopping and entertainment development in Glen Carbon, located in Madison County, which has an unemployment rate of almost 12 percent. The proposal would use state sales tax money from businesses in the district for bonding to fund a development project.

The bill passed in 2009, but Quinn vetoed it. When the plan met strong opposition again this year, it was moved to Marion in Williamson County, which has an 11 percent unemployment rate. Mayors in the Glen Carbon area opposed the bill because they said it would take tax dollars and unfairly put them toward the projects of one developer, in this case Bruce Holland and his Holland Construction. They also said it would hurt other area businesses.

Opponents are concerned that while this proposal is geared toward a specific project, once the STAR genie is out of the bottle, other districts will be created throughout Illinois and will cut into state sales tax revenue at a time when there is none to spare.

Marion Democratic Rep. John Bradley told his fellow representatives he was “begging” them to give the idea a chance,

so new jobs would come to his district. The House passed **Senate Bill 1909** after Bradley’s impassioned appeal.

Perhaps one of the largest pieces of legislation to pass under the banner of job creation this session was a sweeping rewrite of the Telecommunications Act (see page 31). Legislators slapped each other on the back upon passage of the bill, which was generally agreed upon by most parties involved in the process. However, the Citizens Utility Board, a nonprofit organization created by the government to protect the interests of utility consumers, raised red flags about the rollback on consumer protections and the lack of guarantees that the changes would bring in jobs.

Illinois’ unemployment rate is higher than the national average. Manufacturing industries have been taking a hit for years, and state government’s fiscal situation is in rapid decline. Add a national recession the likes of which hasn’t been seen in decades, and soon the economy seems to overshadow all other interests.

It is the job of state legislators to lobby for their districts and put constituents’ needs at the top of their lists of concerns. It is also difficult to tell an unemployed parent with a family that such issues as environmental concerns or tax revenues, which may seem far from personal to them, have to be considered along with job creation.

Nevertheless, legislators must scrutinize development or regulatory proposals that involve a large trade-off, and many plans do. They must weigh the needs of communities against any long-term benefits or damages, perhaps even more so during times when areas desperate for development make prime targets for those who might seek to cash in on their hardship.

That is not to say that all development, even some that involves sacrifice, is in some way predatory or bad for communities or the state as a whole. It is just that both the affected communities and the long-term direction in which the state is headed should be considered when making such decisions. And leaders must fight the temptation to automatically jump on board with any proposal that promises jobs. □

Janey Dunn can be reached at illinois.issues@gmail.com

BRIEFLY

LEGISLATIVE CHECKLIST

Lawmakers spent much of the final days of their regular legislative session on the House and Senate floors discussing all things but the budget. While the governor and legislative leaders were out of sight ironing out possible financial solutions, rank-and-file members worked to pass a wide range of bills, from animal protection to public employee disclosure. Here's a sampling of the General Assembly's latest work:

Monkey ban

HB 4801 Illinoisans could no longer own monkeys as pets, under a bill approved by the General Assembly and sponsored by Democrats Rep. Daniel Burke of Chicago and Sen. Don Harmon of Oak Park.

University borrowing

SB 642 Public universities could, in anticipation of eventual payment, borrow up to 75 percent of what the state owes them, under a measure approved by the General Assembly. Sen. William Haine, an Alton Democrat, and Rep. John Bradley, a Marion Democrat, sponsored the legislation.

Scleral tattoos

SB 3359 Tattoo artists would be prohibited from placing tattoos on people's eyeballs, if the House approves a measure sponsored by Sen. Ira Silverstein, a Chicago Democrat, and Rep. Emily McAsey, a Lockport Democrat. While licensed physicians would be exempt, others could be charged with a misdemeanor. The Senate has already approved the bill.

Tuition waivers

SB 365 A legislative scholarship program will likely not see reforms this year, now that Gov. Pat Quinn has vetoed a measure sponsored by Senate

President John Cullerton, a Chicago Democrat, and Rep. Robert Flider, a Mt. Zion Democrat. The reforms would have limited to whom lawmakers can award state university tuition waivers. Quinn said he would prefer that lawmakers eliminate the program, as proposed in **HB 4685**, to ensure that students receive funds based on need.

Pre-K funding

HB 5322 The state would continue to provide the primary source of funding for preschool programs for at-risk students, if Gov. Pat Quinn signs a bill extending the obligation indefinitely. Chicago Democrat Rep. Barbara Flynn Currie and Maywood Democrat Sen. Kimberly Lightford sponsored the legislation.

Sex offenders

HB 6464 Parents and guardians would be breaking the law by knowingly leaving their children in the care of a registered child sex offender who is not the child's parent, if Gov. Pat Quinn signs legislation sponsored by Sen. Mike Jacobs, an East Moline Democrat, and Rep. Patrick Verschoore, a Milan Democrat. The legislation would also require child sex offenders to report whether they reside with a child.

Truth-in-tuition

SB 3222 Students who are unable to complete their undergraduate degrees within four years would see limited tuition increases for a fifth and sixth year, under a measure approved by both chambers. As an extension of current truth-in-tuition laws, their additional semesters at a state university would cost only the amount charged to the class immediately below them — the rate freshmen paid when they were sophomores. Chicago Democrats Rep.

Daniel Burke and Sen. Martin Sandoval sponsored the bill, which passed in both chambers.

Lobbyist reform

SB 1526 Lobbyists would be required to pay \$300 in annual registration fees, if Gov. Pat Quinn signs legislation rolling back a \$1,000 fee set last year. Evanston Democratic Sen. Jeffrey Schoenberg and Chicago Democratic Rep. Barbara Flynn Currie sponsored the measure.

Bullying

SB 3266 Schools would be required to develop and update policies against bullying every two years, under a measure approved by the General Assembly and sponsored by Maywood Democrats Sen. Kimberly Lightford and Rep. Karen Yarbrough. The legislation defines "bullying" to include physical and emotional harm against students for their sexual orientation.

FOIA exemption

HB 5154 All public employee performance evaluations would become exempt from Freedom of Information Act disclosure rules, under a measure approved by both chambers and sponsored by Sen. Kimberly Lightford, a Maywood Democrat, and Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia, an Aurora Democrat.

Undervoting

SB 2650 Election judges would no longer know whether a voter did not cast a vote for every office, under a measure requiring election authorities by the 2014 primary election to modify voting machines to notify only the voter. The Senate has approved the measure, sponsored by Sen. William Haine, an Alton Democrat, and Rep. Jim Watson, a Jacksonville Republican.

Rachel Wells

U of I's new president

Michael Hogan is expected to be the 18th president of the University of Illinois. He is expected to start next month.

Hogan, an Iowa native, since September 2007 was president of the University of Connecticut. That institution has a total enrollment of nearly 28,000 students on seven campuses and an operating budget of \$1.4 billion.

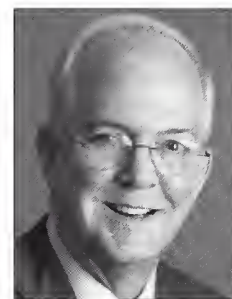
Previously, he was provost at the University of Iowa and had served at Ohio State University as chair of the history department, dean of the College of Humanities and executive dean of the Colleges of the Arts and Sciences.

He earned his bachelor's degree in English from the University of Northern Iowa.

He received his master's and doctoral degrees in history from the University of Iowa. Hogan's area of academic focus is American diplomacy with an emphasis on the post-World War II and Cold War eras. He has written or edited nine books and was the editor of *Diplomatic History*, an international journal that covers diplomacy and foreign affairs. He served as chair of the U.S. State Department's Advisory Committee on Diplomatic Documentation.

Hogan has also been a faculty member at Miami University, Stony Brook University and at the University of Texas, Austin, as well as a fellow at the Harry S. Truman Library Institute and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

"I'm delighted to be returning to the Midwest to lead the [U of I], a top-tier institution and center of outstanding research and scholarship," Hogan said in a written statement.



Michael Hogan

"I grew up in the Midwest, earned my degrees here and started my family here. I couldn't be more pleased to return to my roots as president of this world-class university."

Hogan, who will succeed interim U of I President Stanley Ikenberry, will be paid \$620,000.

Cities penalize those who let minors drink



Lake County Sheriff Mark Curran

It's the season for school proms and graduations, and Illinois communities are preparing for celebrations. And this spring, more are taking a stronger stance on underage drinking and adults who provide alcohol to minors.

In April, Lake County officials approved a social host ordinance that applies to unincorporated areas. Similar to municipal ordinances in Antioch, Buffalo Grove, Gurnee, Lindenhurst, Mundelein and Round Lake Beach, the ordinance aims to curb underage drinking by holding not only parents accountable, but babysitters, neighbors or older siblings who are deemed responsible for a social gathering. The ordinance can also be enforced anywhere from a home or banquet hall to a limousine or boat.

"We had situations where minors were drinking, and it resulted in reckless homicide," says Lake County Sheriff Mark Curran. "We passed a local ordinance to get the word out that underage drinking is not acceptable, and it's gotten some exposure as we move into the peak drinking season for high schoolers."

While social host laws may vary from one community to another, parents and adults in those communities face fines for each violation. The ordinance for unincorporated Lake County calls for fines ranging from \$250 to \$1,000. Curran says these social host ordinances help balance and supplement state law pertaining to underage drinking and providing alcohol to minors.

Illinois law stipulates that it is unlawful for any parent or guardian to knowingly permit an underage drinker to consume alcohol in the home. The violation is a misdemeanor that carries a fine of at least \$500. If a violation results in bodily harm or death, the violator can be charged with a felony.

Although the law is similar to the social host ordinances throughout several communities in Illinois, Mundelein Police Chief Ray Rose says the Illinois law still leaves room for loopholes.

"The Illinois statute only pertains to parents and guardians, not other kids," Rose says, "and it only seems to hold the parents and guardians accountable if the underage drinking results in injury or death."

"This is a countywide effort," Rose says, "and so far, 26 of the 48 communities in the county have adopted the social host ordinance. We want to send a strong message to parents to step up and not allow underage drinking to take place in their homes and under their supervision."

Rose notes that while most parents think they are solving a problem by super-

vising underage drinking in their home and taking car keys away, the real issue is that underage drinking is being tolerated at all.

Social host laws are becoming more widespread in northern Illinois but are less common in central and southern Illinois. An exception is Eureka in central Illinois.

"We've had a social host ordinance for about five years," says Eureka Chief of Police Eric Luckey. "Prior to this ordinance, Eureka was a dry town, but once a referendum was passed to allow alcohol, we passed a social host law along with it." The ordinance holds parents and guardians accountable if they knowingly authorize, enable or permit underage drinking by failing to control access to the residence or the alcohol maintained in the residence. The fine is \$750 per offense.

"Our ordinance is more about raising awareness," Luckey says. "Parents are being made aware that they have to secure alcohol in their residence if they're gone and to not allow underage drinking at their residence if they're home."

Social host laws may not exist in all Illinois counties and communities yet, but Rose said he hopes that they will become more widespread in the future.

"It's all about consistency," Rose says. "And with prom and graduation time, we really need to worry and be concerned about what our kids are doing. Underage drinking is not an acceptable behavior — it's dangerous, and we don't want prom or graduation, events that are supposed to be fun, to end in tragedy."

Nicole Harbour

Law would help adoptees obtain birth certificates

After months agonizing over every detail of a letter to her birth mother, a 20-something Sara Feigenholtz was astonished when she received a near immediate response.

"When we first spoke ... she said to me, 'What took you so long?' And I said to her: 'What took me so long? How come you never tried to find me?'" Feigenholtz, now a member of the Illinois House of Representatives, says. "She said, 'I never thought I had the right.'"

While Feigenholtz, a Chicago Democrat, wanted to meet her birth mother, most adoptees aren't as interested in outreach as they are in obtaining their birth certificates, she says. Right now in Illinois, confidential outreach by a third party is possible, allowing contact in cases where both the mother and the child agree, but obtaining a birth certificate isn't.

"I fell into a minority of people who actually wanted to do a search. ... Up until this becomes law, we force people who only want their identity to touch, to do an outreach to a family," she says.

Feigenholtz's latest adoption legislation, **House Bill 5428**, would make open birth certificates the default.

"I think in the great debate of adoption ... there's a lot of concern about we're either being infantilized, or always children, or we're stalkers," Feigenholtz says.

Adult adoptees seeking their birth certificates, she believes, are "asking legitimate adult questions about where they came from and who they are."

If Gov. Pat Quinn signs **HB 5428**, adult adoptees would regain what Feigenholtz calls "a fundamental right" — access to their birth certificates, to their own names. "It finally gives adoptive families the same rights as other families."

But still not everyone would be able to see his or her birth certificate. "As hard as it is for me ... there are going to be some people who have denials on file," Feigenholtz says. "But it's going to be less than 3 percent."

The measure would allow new birth parents to opt for anonymity when they surrender their child. And because the measure would also apply to decades-old adoptions, it calls for a year-long information campaign, so any parents wishing to maintain anonymity could submit the appropriate forms.

But while Feigenholtz says her legislation would give birth parents a voice, some say it could place additional pressure on them at a crucial moment.

Illinois Right to Life Committee executive director Bill Beckman says Feigenholtz's legislation might cause mothers "under duress" to choose abortion instead of adoption.



Rep. Sara Feigenholtz

"The people that are trying to defend the rights of these people that have the opportunity to get their birth certificates once they become adults, it's going to be very ironic that fewer of them are going to be around to have that right," Beckman says.

Feigenholtz, emphasizing mothers' remaining right to choose anonymity, says Beckman's fear is "a red herring."

"It seems like the mechanism that was in place was working for the most part," says Beckman. "This is like a contractual thing. ... [Birth parents] should have the right to abide to the contract as originally given."

Rachel Wells

For updated news see the *Illinois Issues* Web site at <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>

State closes caves to prevent white nose syndrome in bats

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources closed caves throughout the state to prevent the spread of a phenomenon that is killing cave-dwelling bats by the thousands across the country.

Since white nose syndrome first showed up in New York in 2006, it has moved to almost a dozen states, including Missouri. Joseph Kath, endangered species manager for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, estimates it has killed more than a million bats total. While it has not reached Illinois, Kath considers it only a matter of time until it does. Scientists are scrambling to find out what causes it and some way to stop its spread.

Affected bats have a white fungus growing on their muzzles and sometimes their wings. They lack an enzyme that helps them properly metabolize food and fat reserves during hibernation. "They're waking up in the middle of winter hungry, very hungry, starving actually."

The sickness is named after the fungus; however, experts do not know if it is what causes the bats to burn through their fat stores. Kath says it is possible the fungus is just taking advantage of the bats' weakened immune systems. "The more and more time that goes by, it just seems the more and more questions that arise," he says.

After waking from hibernation, the bats fly in and out of their caves searching in vain in the cold for insects to eat. They eventually starve to death, usually

dropping in or near the cave. Once a colony is infected, white nose syndrome virtually decimates it, killing off thousands of bats. The mortality rate is almost 100 percent.

While bats may not be the most beloved creatures, their voracious appetites help control pest populations. "What people don't realize is that bats on an annual basis literally consume billions of tons of insects per year."

If the bat population drops significantly, farmers would have to use more pesticides.

"Not only does that pose a problem from a chemical standpoint, you are looking at an increased cost in crop production, which means your food at the grocery store is going to cost more," Kath says.

BOOK REVIEW

Author profiles

Dawn Clark Netsch

Anyone who follows Illinois government knows the name Dawn Clark Netsch. She has opened doors by breaking into the “boys’ clubs” of law and politics and by advocating for the civil rights of all citizens since the 1940s. As a progressive Democrat, she went up against the Chicago political machine, and her contributions to state government will shape the future of the state for years to come.

Cynthia Grant Bowman, one of Netsch’s former colleagues at Northwestern University School of Law, wrote *Dawn Clark Netsch: A Political Life*, which was published by the school. The book traces Netsch’s life from her birth in Cincinnati through her early political work on Adlai Stevenson’s campaigns for governor and U.S. president, her career in law — both practicing and teaching — her time as a state senator and Illinois comptroller and her own unsuccessful run for governor.

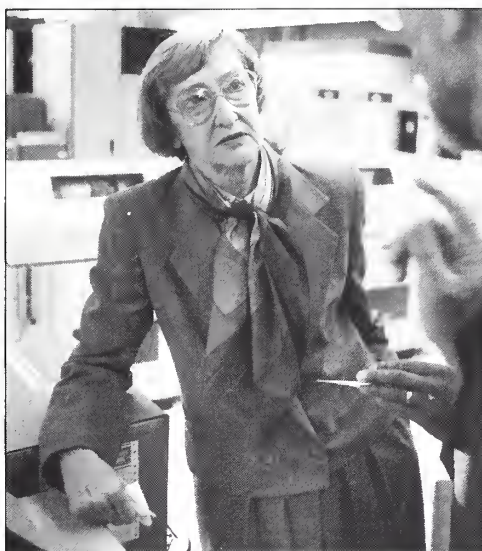
In the preface, the author highlights Netsch’s unique personality. Bowman writes, “Dawn is a warm and charming woman of many contradictions — a schoolmarm who drinks and smokes, a powerful woman who has never learned to drive, a feminist who thought of herself as one of the boys, a well-to-do woman who is frugal to a fault.”

That well-known personality hooks the reader into the book. Now in her 80s, Netsch, a professor of law emerita at Northwestern and member of *Illinois Issues*’ advisory board, continues to be an astute observer and participant in the arena of public policy. She is often asked to weigh in on the news of the day and never minces words when she does. However, her blunt nature is tempered by a sense of humor and what seems a genuine drive to

The Department of Natural Resources is keeping people out of state-owned or managed caves in an attempt to avoid spreading white nose syndrome. Experts know it can be transmitted between bats but do not know if humans can carry it from cave to cave.

“We’re at that point where really nothing has been proven. The only thing that has been proven is that it spreads, and it spreads very quickly,” he says. “We can’t afford to take any more gambles, any more risks.” Kath says that most states in the path of the fungus’ progression across the country are closing their caves.

There is no end date for the closures. The Department of Natural Resources plans to review the issues quarterly and is urging local governments to close



Dawn Clark Netsch during her 1994 campaign for governor

improve government whenever possible.

Netsch wrote to a former mentor in her early 20s: “My life is still dedicated to government service and still — until the lessons become too bitter — to the medium of politics. ... Indifference has always been the greatest internal enemy of democracy. That will probably still be my battle cry when I die a poverty-stricken, disillusioned old party hack. But they will have to sit on me hard to make me disavow it.”

While Netsch’s passion, personality and trailblazing list of accomplishments make for interesting reading, her life also intersects important events in Illinois history. The book gives some interesting tidbits from her time working for Gov. Otto Kerner, who was convicted on corruption charges in 1973, as a delegate to the constitutional convention in 1970 and her historic

bid as the first woman nominated by a major party to seek the office of governor.

For example, a controversial component of the Illinois Constitution, the governor’s amendatory veto power, was first proposed by Netsch in a position paper she wrote while serving on a research commission leading up to the rewrite of the Constitution. The provision allows governors to make changes to legislation that comes to their desks and then send the bills back to the legislature to approve the changes. The original intent of the concept was to let governors clean up mistakes or make small changes so a bill with minor problems wouldn’t be struck down by the veto pen and go back through the often-arduous legislative process. In recent years, governors from Jim Edgar to Rod Blagojevich have been accused of abusing the power. It is details like those that will appeal to Illinois history buffs, as well as those interested in Netsch’s extraordinary life.

Jamey Dunn

Photograph courtesy of the New York Department of Environmental Conservation



caves under their jurisdiction. It also wants citizens to keep out of caves on private land. Researchers at Western Illinois University are working with the state to try to solve the mystery of white nose. They are testing fungal samples

from Illinois caves and hope to step up their efforts next winter because the fungus thrives in cold weather. Kath says, “We’re on the cusp of ecological disaster here, and we can’t just sit by and let it happen.”

Jamey Dunn

ATTITUDES ABOUT GOVERNMENT

Southern Illinois

Southern Illinoisans don't support the job their governor or their president is doing, but they do favor their local politicians, regardless of party. Those and other attitudes about government, politics, taxes and public services are part of a survey conducted in April by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (<http://paulsimoninstitute.org>).

Researchers also asked registered voters their opinions of guns, hunting, religion, abortion and gay rights, race and Chicagoans, as well as where they got their news.

"I want to make sure we're looking at the culture," institute director David Yepsen says.

He says he and institute researchers had two goals in designing this inaugural poll of Illinoisans in the southernmost 18 counties: ask about attitudes on issues — "the usual stuff, job approval and horse race" — but also ask questions on topics such as religion, hunting and guns.

The poll was conducted from April 5-13. It surveyed 401 southern Illinoisans, and had a margin of error of 4.9 percent.

In general, Yepsen says the poll shows that southern Illinoisans "think the state and nation are headed in the wrong direction. They don't like the health care bill or the jobs the president, the governor or Congress are doing."

Only 22.7 percent think the country is on the right track, leaving 69.8 percent believing America is going in the wrong direction. But fewer think Illinois is on the right path — a mere 6.5 percent — compared with 85.3 percent who think the state is on the wrong path.

More than half of those polled, 52.6 percent, believe the new health care insurance reform law is a bad thing. Only 26.7 percent believe it is a good thing, with 20.7 percent without an opinion.

As might be expected from past election results, southern Illinois voters are leaning toward Republican candidates. Gubernatorial nominee Sen. Bill Brady of Bloomington is favored with 48.6 percent over Gov. Pat Quinn's 25.4 percent. Green Party candidate Rich Whitney of Carbondale garners 4.2 percent. A few, 1.5 percent,

want another candidate, and 19.2 percent are undecided.

President Barack Obama received a job approval rating of 36.7 percent from southern Illinoisans; Quinn has an approval rating of just 30.9 percent. Congress, too, gets low marks, but U.S. Rep. Jerry Costello, 12th District Democrat, fared better. He won approval from 45.1 percent, with 24.2 percent disapproving and 30.7 percent undecided. Rep. John Shimkus, 19th District Republican, has higher undecideds (42.6 percent), with 41.9 percent who approve and 15.5 percent who disapprove.

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, District 10 Republican, is ahead of state Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias, 42.1 percent to 24.7 percent, for the U.S. Senate seat being vacated by Sen. Roland Burris. Green Party candidate LeAlan Jones has 4.5 percent, with 3 percent wanting some other candidate and 25.7 percent undecided.

When asked about what the state should do to close the \$13 billion budget gap, six in 10 said to cut "waste." However, when asked specifically what to cut among the programs that spend the most tax dollars, they overwhelmingly opposed cutting K-12 education (87.3 percent); community colleges (76.3 percent); universities (67.1 percent); public safety (78.6 percent); and state parks (57.9 percent).

Yet, 80.5 percent of voters agree that southern Illinois does not get its "fair share" of state resources. Yepsen says academics argue that is just not true. "Southern Illinois probably gets more than its fair share," he says.

Though Yepsen says it's difficult to track beyond sales and income tax revenues, "with all the money that comes in from Springfield for schools, roads, prisons, SIU and community colleges, it doesn't seem like this area legitimately has any complaint."

Yepsen says the poll is a great tool for scholars and a resource for students. Next year, he would like to expand the pool of respondents to all adults, particularly those who are likely voters. He says a larger sample would include more young people who may not be registered voters but would voice a different perspective.

"We have this tool, and researchers may have ideas we can add. We can track these attitudes over time."

Beverly Scobell

United States and Illinois

A recent Pew Research Center poll found "a perfect storm of conditions associated with distrust of government — a dismal economy, an unhappy public, bitter partisan-based backlash and epic discontent with Congress and elected officials."

And Illinois is likely no exception.

"I think the down-with-politics-and-government attitude at this point is pretty widespread," says political scientist Kent Redfield, a professor emeritus at the University of Illinois Springfield.

The April Pew report notes "by almost every conceivable measure, Americans are less positive and more critical of government these days." In the main survey, conducted March 11-21 among 2,505 adults, only 22 percent say they can trust government in Washington, D.C. According to Pew, that result is among the lowest measures in a half century.

"Opinions about elected officials are particularly poor. In a follow-up survey in early April, just 25 percent expressed a favorable opinion of Congress, which was virtually unchanged from March (26 percent), prior to passage of the health care reform bill. This is the lowest favorable rating for Congress in a quarter century of Pew Research Center surveys. Over the last year, favorable opinions of Congress have declined by half."

In Illinois, faith in the governor and General Assembly is low, Redfield says, adding that people are weary of scandals and the major budget crisis. "All of that creates a pretty toxic climate."

Illinois, as a diverse, Democratic-leaning state, virtually mirrors the nation — although there is probably greater approval of the president in the Land of Lincoln than across the nation as a whole because he's a favorite son, Redfield says.

According to the Pew Research Center findings: "Rather than an activist government to deal with the nation's top problems, the public now wants government reformed, and growing numbers want its power curtailed. With the exception of greater regulation of major financial institutions, there is less of an appetite for government solutions to the nation's problems — including more government control over the economy — than there was when [President] Barack Obama first took office."

Maureen Foertsch McKinney

Preservationists highlight Chicago theater, other sites

Photographs courtesy of Landmarks Illinois

In the 1920s, Uptown, a north side neighborhood in Chicago, was known for its cafes, vaudeville theaters, dance halls, music venues and shops. The jewel of the neighborhood was the Uptown Theater. Designed by architects Rapp and Rapp, the theater covers 46,000 square feet of land, has an auditorium that seats 4,381 and a 70-foot-long stage. Decorated in the baroque style, the theater was known for its opulent details, including cloth drapes, detailed murals, grille work and imported chandeliers.

The theater closed its doors in the 1980s and has been vacant since. The structure has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1986 and was deemed a Chicago landmark in 1991. Despite the work of advocacy groups, the theater is deteriorating. In 1996, the National Trust for Historic Preservation placed it on its list of "Eleven Most Endangered Places." In 1996 and 2001, the structure was named one of the 10 most endangered historic places by Landmarks Illinois. Once again, the structure was named by the organization as one of 2010's 10 most endangered historic places in Illinois.

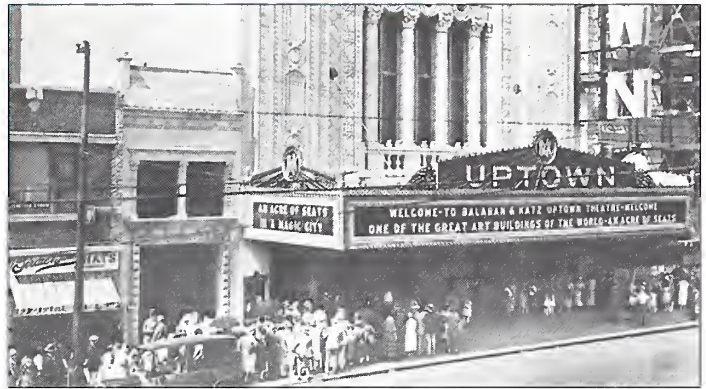
Released annually, the list focuses on sites throughout the state that are threatened by deterioration, lack of maintenance, insufficient funding or encroaching development. Many of the sites on this year's list have been affected by the economic downturn.

Jim Peters, president and CEO of Landmarks Illinois, says while the recession slowed down many restoration projects, there is a silver lining for historic buildings. "The economy is a two-edged sword, I think, for preservation. ... It does make it more difficult to find funding and move a project ahead. But then again, the building, new construction projects that might have torn down some of these buildings, also have been stalled."

Since 1995 when the annual list debuted, 42 sites have been saved, 34 have been demolished or substantially altered, and 90 remain threatened to some degree. "We don't forget about the sites once they're listed, and I know that the local community groups never forget about the sites," Peters says.

Also on the list is Red Cliff in Moline. A local architect, J.B. Salisbury, built the home in 1875. In 1876, John Deere moved into the home to be closer to his son and have a view of his river-front factory. Deere made extensive renovations and additions to the home, where he lived until his death in 1886. The Deere family owned the home until the mid-1930s, when it was turned into efficiency apartments. The home is now vacant and in poor condition. "We want people to know this home is in need. John Deere is known worldwide, and this home is significant to his life. It shows the extent of his success in life," says Barbara Sandberg, a member of the Moline Preservation Society. "Deere is a founding father of Moline. We truly hope to find someone to save this home."

The list includes Chanute Headquarters and Mess Hall in Rantoul, Litchfield's Manske-Niemann Farm, the Massac Theater in Metropolis, the Bass-Mollett House in Greenville, Chicago's Prentice Women's Hospital, the St. Laurence Complex and the northern corner of the Pullman Historic District. Illinois Main Street Program, geared toward preservation of downtown economic development, was placed on the list as well. Due to budget cuts, the state has eliminated all technical assistance services and reduced staff for the program. Since 1993, the program has gen-



Uptown Theater opening day, August 19, 1925



Uptown Theater in 2010



Red Cliff home

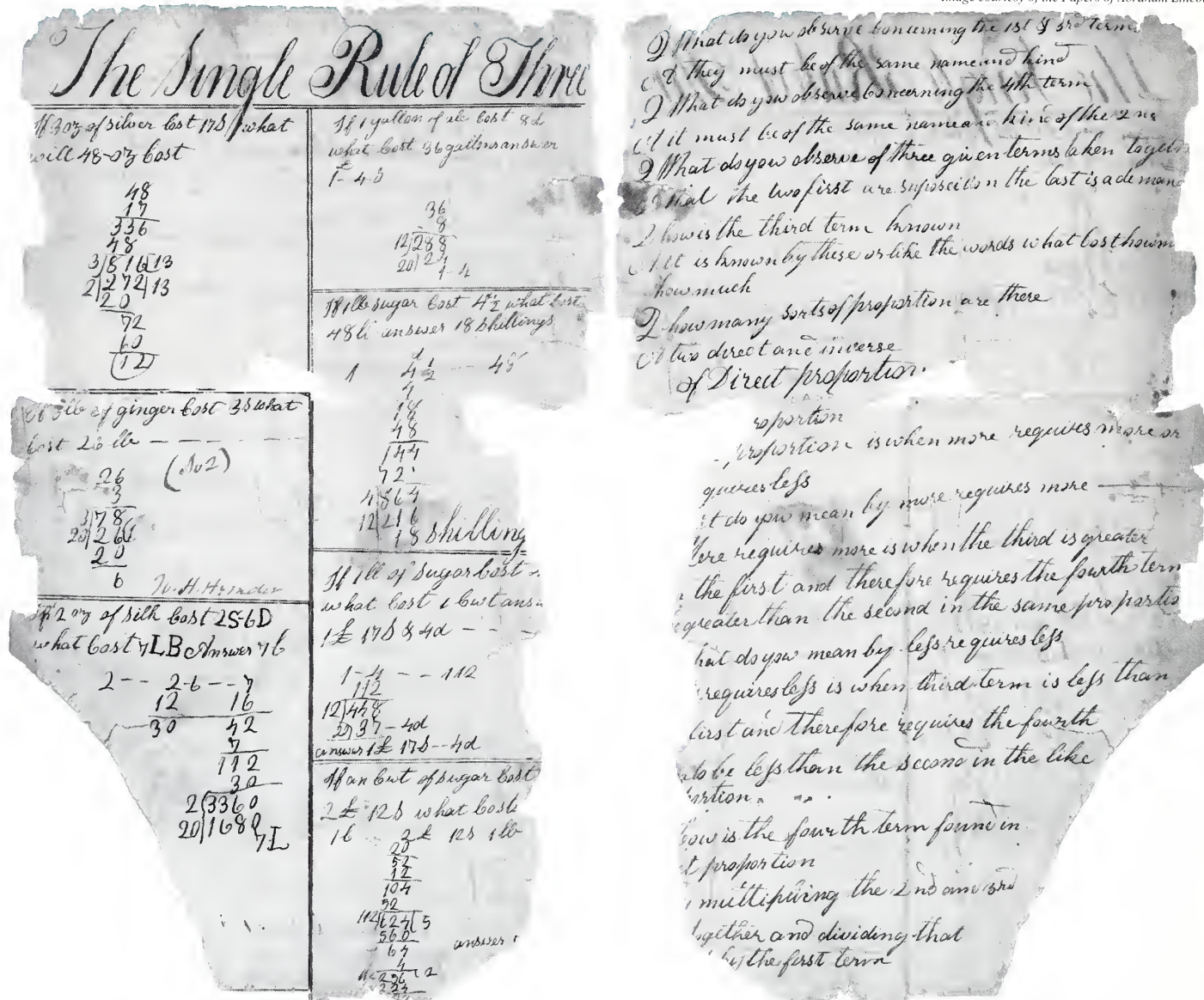
erated more than \$400 million in downtown reinvestment and created more than 4,800 jobs.

"We worked very hard to expand Main Street. ... We had all kinds of investment in terms of human volunteers participating in the program," says Gov. Pat Quinn, who headed the program as lieutenant governor. "Obviously, in our state government, we have cut back everywhere. And we just have to weather this economic recession and get to a better place. But Main Street is always going to, as far as I'm concerned, do OK."

Jamey Dunn and Melissa Weissert

Researchers reunite pieces of Lincoln document

Image courtesy of the Papers of Abraham Lincoln



With less than a year of formal education, Abraham Lincoln turned to other methods to learn. One was to write math problems into a copybook as a way to memorize the problems. Recently, researchers at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library digitally reunited halves of a ripped page from Lincoln's copybook.

Half of the document was located at Brown University in Providence, R.I., and the other at the University of Chicago. Daniel Stowell, executive director of the Papers of Abraham Lincoln, visited Brown University five years ago to scan the ripped document for the collection. Last year, while at the University of Chicago, he found another ripped page from the copybook. Stowell recognized

that the documents matched and digitally reunited them after more than 100 years. Each half of the page will stay in its respective archive.

About 10 partial or complete pages of the copybook dating back to about 1824 are known to exist, making them the oldest existing Lincoln documents. After Lincoln's death, his stepmother, Sarah Bush Lincoln, gave the copybook to William Herndon, Lincoln's third law partner. Herndon separated the book and gave pages away as mementos. The remaining pages are located in a variety of repositories, including Yale University, Columbia University, the Indiana Historical Society, Chicago History Museum and in private collections.

The math problems come from *The*

Schoolmaster's Assistant, a popular English arithmetic textbook that Lincoln probably borrowed from a neighbor or teacher. The problems are based on a calculation method called the single rule of three, in which an unknown number is determined based on the known numbers.

As an adult, Lincoln was known to read aloud from the newspaper, stating that by reading and speaking the words, he was better able to remember the information. "The copybook shows Lincoln as a teenager trying to improve himself," says Stowell. "Reading and writing the problems etched the information deeper in his own mind. The copybook shows Lincoln developing a learning style that he used for the rest of his life."

Melissa Weissert

ICC slashes Ameren rate hike

The Illinois Commerce Commission slashed a rate increase requested by the utility company Ameren Illinois. As a result, customers will not see drastic hikes in their power bills. However, the utility warns that the decision will lead to a hiring freeze and other cuts within the company.

Ameren asked for an increase of \$162 million to "delivery fees," which the company charges customers for distribution of electricity and natural gas to homes and businesses. According to the Citizens Utility Board, a group created by the legislature to protect the interests of utility customers, these fees make up one-third of consumer's bills, while the cost of the power itself makes up two-thirds. In a 3-2 vote, the commission gave the utility a \$14.7 million increase.

Manuel Flores, the acting chairman of the commission who was appointed by Gov. Pat Quinn last January, voted in favor of the reduced rate increase. Quinn helped found CUB in the 1980s. The vote came after CUB, Attorney General Lisa Madigan, the Illinois chapter of AARP and others pushed for a much smaller increase than Ameren's request.

"The [Illinois Commerce Commis-

sion] followed the law and carefully considered the evidence, which showed that Ameren did not need anything close to a \$162 million increase," CUB executive director David Kolata said. "In today's tough economic climate, it's more important than ever that Ameren not be allowed to unfairly pad its profits on the backs of ratepayers."

Ameren officials say they have already made efforts to trim the budget, including a freeze on raises for management.

"The amount approved by the Commission may hinder our ability to provide the service our customers expect," Scott Cisel, AmerenCILCO, AmerenCIPS and AmerenIP president and chief executive officer, said in a written statement to employees.

"Unfortunately the decision that was made by the commission is going to require us to make more cuts to be in line with the revenue they have allowed," Ameren spokesman Leigh Morris says.

Ameren plans to institute a hiring freeze, delay or cancel some planned projects and cut capital projects "designed to enhance reliability" of

delivery systems. Morris adds that Ameren Illinois is not yet considering layoffs as a budget solution.

"These actions are regrettable but necessary. We will exhaust every avenue in search of an equitable solution that allows us to meet our obligations to customers, co-workers and shareholders," Cisel said.

Soon after the commission's decision, Ameren Energy Resources Co. announced 75 layoffs in Illinois and Missouri. Morris says while Ameren Illinois, the utility, and Ameren Energy Resources, the power generator, share the same holding company, it is the only connection they share. He says the layoffs have nothing to do with his company or the rates it charges for delivery. (For more information on power procurement, see *Illinois Issues* July/August 2009, page 25.) "It's simply a timing issue. They made their announcement, and it is in no way, shape or form connected to the decision [made by the commission]."

Ameren Illinois has appealed the Illinois Commerce Commission's ruling on its rates.

Jamey Dunn

Civic Federation: Thumbs down on Quinn budget

As the General Assembly geared up for its final push to forge a state spending plan, the nonpartisan Civic Federation issued a report panning Gov. Pat Quinn's budget proposal.

"The Civic Federation opposes Gov. Pat Quinn's \$52 billion FY2011 recommended operating budget for the state of Illinois because it is unbalanced and does too little to address the state's fiscal crisis. The governor's recommended budget borrows billions to pay for operations while continuing to ignore the massive backlog of unpaid bills, which will make the state's financial condition worse," states a late April report by the Chicago-based organization.

"The report we released ... is really aimed at calling attention to the fact the governor and General Assembly need to do a better job of stabilizing the state's finances and not relying so heavily on borrowing and not continuing to ignore the unpaid bills," says Laurence Msall, president of the Civic Federation. "We think the important first step — that really has to get much more serious attention — is reduction in spending; not just as a prelude to raising taxes but to structurally reduce spending so you can have resources to fund the pensions and pay the unpaid bills and existing obligations of the state."

Kelly Kraft, Quinn's spokeswoman for the Office of Management and Budget, defended his plan, which calls for a

1 percentage point increase in the state income tax to fund education spending.

That tax increase, coupled with budget cuts, is necessary "to restore fiscal balance," stated Kraft in an e-mail. "One without the other cannot do the job. Both are necessary to secure our state's bond ratings and the ability to engage in the short-term and intermediate-term borrowing needed to pay our bills on time."

Msall counters: "Borrowing is not revenue. It is both expensive and does not make the situation better."

Kraft stated: "Our budget plan makes the tough decisions necessary to address the state's challenges and provides solutions to pay our bills, protect jobs and save taxpayers' money. The largest taxpayer savings comes from the historic pension reform bill that Governor Quinn recently signed into law. As the Civic Federation points out, this law will save taxpayers money while stabilizing the state retirement systems."

Msall says his organization is pleased that the governor and General Assembly took the step making cuts to the state pension system, but he added a caveat: "We do not support the reduction in the pension contribution unless the actuaries for the pensions certify that the savings will actually exist this year."

Maureen Foertsch McKinney

Students depict southern Illinois community in photographs

Cairo, located in Alexander County, was recently the star of a photo shoot. Throughout March, students from Southern Illinois University Carbondale photographed the town to preserve the history of the city and document the city's appearance. City officials hope the students' work will enhance Cairo's web presence and economic development.

The project began when Andy Sisulak, who was working with the Cairo Chamber of Commerce to build a website for the city, approached Southern Illinois University Carbondale professors Daniel Overturf and Antonio Martinez.

"Getting out of the classroom and into the world, dealing with townspeople, finding out their concerns, gives students real-life experience," says Overturf, an associate professor in the Department of Cinema and Photography.

The goal was to get a positive and factual representation of how Cairo appears today. The project documented the town's historical structures, landscape and everyday features. Building an image bank is important for communities, says Overturf. Photographs that seem unremarkable today might be significant in the future.

Twenty-five students from two senior-level photography classes were given the assignment to photograph Cairo. Since it was the first year for the project, the students were given few restrictions. The students were assigned a list of sites but also were told to photograph whatever sparked their interest.

In April, the project culminated in an exhibit in which 25 framed images were displayed.

Overturf says, "Young people have a desire to reach out, to give back and make a difference."

Melissa Weissert



Photograph by Dan Overturf

Street sign



Photograph by Adam Nelson

Gem Theater



President Barack Obama waits in the White House with Vice President Joe Biden before delivering remarks and signing the health care reform bill.

Health care reform

New law has ramifications for Illinoisans

by Dean Olsen

For Tim Fraas, a heart-transplant patient from Elgin, the prospect of reaching the \$2 million cap on lifetime benefits for his health-insurance coverage wasn't a mere possibility over the next few years. "It was going to happen for sure," he says. "I was beyond worrying about it."

That's why he was more than merely glad to see Congress pass the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which President Barack Obama signed into law on March 23. The biggest change to the health care system in a generation, the law is expected to cost \$1 trillion or more over the next 10 years, and one of its provisions — the elimination of lifetime benefit caps — will take effect this fall.

"We're planning a party," says Fraas, a 53-year-old land surveyor, who is insured

through his wife's job as a teacher's aide in Elgin School District U-46.

The personal health crisis that led to Fraas' transplant in 2008 would give him the type of "pre-existing condition" that can make insurance unaffordable. It's a situation that hampers many of Illinois' 1.7 million uninsured citizens.

By 2014, the reform law will eliminate pre-existing conditions as a reason for insurance plans to deny coverage or boost rates, so Fraas, who hopes to return to work, knows he likely will benefit from the law in both the short and long term.

Such certainty is elusive, however, when it comes to other views about the law's overall impact on Illinois' citizens, employers, health care providers and state government.

The law will add more than a half-

million people to a Medicaid program that already covers one in every five Illinoisans, and it will give the Illinois General Assembly and other state officials the responsibility for creating and administering a brand-new bureaucracy: an insurance "exchange" expected to serve more than 1 million people, many of whom will qualify for tax credits and subsidies to help them afford coverage.

Only two and a half months after a Democratic president from Chicago and the Democrat-controlled U.S. House and Senate performed political gymnastics to get the reforms passed without a single Republican vote, reactions to the law range from excitement to uncertainty and disdain.

"What this does is ensures that all low-income Americans have access to health

insurance, including Medicaid at certain levels,” says Theresa Eagleson, director of medical programs at the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services. “Certainly this is going to help folks who don’t have good access to insurance now.”

Though Eagleson doesn’t seem as concerned, state Rep. Rosemary Mulligan, a Des Plaines Republican, worries that the new law — much of which will be carried out by individual states beginning this year — will push Illinois into a budget hole even deeper than the \$13 billion state budget deficit expected for the fiscal year starting July 1.

“Although some of the provisions are good ... I’m not quite sure how all of it will work out,” she says. “I’m not saying it doesn’t have good ideas, but we should just tread carefully.”

The Illinois General Assembly isn’t among the legislatures challenging the constitutionality of the law’s insurance mandate for individual citizens, but that doesn’t mean critics are quiet here.

The Illinois Policy Institute says the law, with its increased Medicare taxes on the

wealthy and new fees imposed on the pharmaceutical and insurance industries, will further depress the national and state economy, accelerate medical inflation, lead to the loss of 169,000 jobs in Illinois and harm, rather than help, the poor and uninsured.

“I don’t see much good that’s going to come out of it,” says John Tillman, the conservative think tank’s chief executive officer. “Nobody’s arguing about the fact that we need reform. The question is what form reform should take. This shifts power from the insurance companies to the government when the government already can’t handle its financial obligations. It will put the state budget of Illinois at risk.”

Jim Duffett, executive director of the Champaign-based Campaign for Better Health Care and a supporter of the new law, says he isn’t surprised by the critics. “These are the same opponents who embraced the status quo,” he says. “Every mistake and every problem with the bill will be perceived with the ‘sky is falling’-type of mentality. The law is going to have a very positive, tremendous impact.”

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, a Democrat, says critics largely ignore the analysis of the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. Tillman says the CBO often gets estimates wrong about the long-term impact of major programs, but Durbin says the health care reform law “is good for business, good for jobs and good for the economy.”

Durbin says the law is the “largest tax cut in history” for middle-class families and will help slow or decrease, not increase, the price of premiums.

Reforms in the law to improve the health care system will “not only save the system costs but also reduce premiums for businesses,” he says. “In turn, businesses will have the economic capital to grow, potentially creating 2.5 million to 4 million additional jobs over the next 10 years, at a rate of 250,000 to 400,000 per year. This includes 17,775 jobs in Illinois by 2020.”

One of the law’s most significant changes takes effect in 2014, when Medicaid is expanded to low-income uninsured adults without children up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$14,404 a

The details

The federal health care reform law is expected to cover 32 million more Americans, but 23 million would remain uninsured by 2019. Among those left out would be about 7 million illegal immigrants who are explicitly excluded from the law’s benefits. Others include those who would be exempt from the individual insurance mandate based on their income, and those who wouldn’t be poor enough to be included in the Medicaid expansion.

Here are some of the law’s provisions for the near-term:

- **Small business tax credits:** Offers tax credits to businesses with 25 or fewer full-time employees to make employee coverage more affordable. Tax credits of up to 35 percent of premiums will be immediately available to firms that choose to offer coverage, effective beginning with tax returns for calendar year 2010.
- **Medicare Part D “doughnut hole”:** Provides a \$250 rebate to Medicare beneficiaries who hit the gap in drug coverage in 2010. Beginning in 2011, institutes a 50 percent discount on brand-name drugs in the doughnut hole. Completely closes the doughnut hole by 2020.
- **Employer health care costs:** Beginning this year, employers will be allowed to reduce health care costs through a temporary reinsurance program for early retirees. Participating employers, including state and local governments, will be reimbursed for 80 percent of medical claims between \$15,000 and \$90,000 incurred by retired employees.

- **Rescissions:** Health insurance “rescissions,” when an insurance company retroactively cancels a person’s coverage after he or she gets sick, will be prohibited except in instances of fraud, effective this year.
- **Preventive services:** After September 23, all health insurance plans will have to provide first-dollar coverage for a defined set of preventive benefits.
- **Lifetime dollar limits:** After September 23, health plans won’t be able to impose lifetime dollar limits. Annual coverage limits will be prohibited entirely in 2014.
- **Premium value:** After January 1, health insurance companies that spend less than a certain percentage of premium dollars on health care will be required to rebate excess premiums to policyholders. For plans sold to individuals and small employers, health insurance companies will be required to spend 80 percent of premium dollars on health care rather than administration and profits. For plans sold to employers with more than 50 employees, the target is 85 percent or more to be spent on health care.
- **Improved coverage for children:** Young adult children, up to age 26, will be able to receive coverage through a parent’s health insurance policy, although the cost of that coverage may be more expensive than for younger children. Illinois law already requires plans that provide coverage to dependents to allow adults to remain on their parents’ plans until age 26 (and up to age 30 for military veterans). The federal law makes self-insured plans offer coverage to adult children up to age 26.

Source: Illinois Department of Insurance

year for an individual. These adults make up more than one-third of all the uninsured.

Illinois' Medicaid program currently covers low-income adults without dependent children only when they have permanent disabilities or are senior citizens, and then only if they are at or below the poverty line.

The reform law would add an estimated 600,000 to 700,000 Illinoisans to Medicaid, putting them in a pool with 2.6 million Illinoisans already on Medicaid and other state-subsidized health care programs. The programs together cost \$15 billion a year, with \$9 billion, or 60 percent, reimbursed by the federal government.

U.S. Rep. Aaron Schock, a Peoria Republican, pointing to an analysis from the conservative Heritage Foundation, says the Medicaid expansion would cost Illinois an additional \$1.8 billion from 2014 to 2019 (\$1.5 billion for benefits to recipients and almost \$381 million in administrative costs).

But Eagleson notes that the federal government will pick up 100 percent of the cost of the new benefits during that period and a big chunk of the administrative expenses. Even after 2019, the federal government will continue to cover at least 90 percent of the cost of the benefits expansion, which means Illinois would have to come up with about \$200 million a year in 2020 and beyond, Eagleson says.

Tillman and other critics have questioned whether enough doctors would be willing to serve additional Medicaid patients when Medicaid rates for many medical services are lower than Medicare and private insurance rates, and when payments, at times, also have been slow.

But Eagleson says the state's success with the Primary Care Case Management program (also known as Illinois Health Connect), which pays primary care doctors monthly fees for providing "medical homes" for most Medicaid patients, shows there should be enough capacity.

In fact, Illinois Health Connect is operating with 5.3 million slots for 1.8 million current Medicaid patients, according to Vincent Keenan, executive vice president of the Illinois Academy of Family Physicians.

Medicaid patients in some parts of the state say they don't have much of a choice of doctors willing to accept them. But in theory, Keenan says, there are more than



Members of the audience listen as President Barack Obama addresses a town hall meeting on health care insurance reform in Belgrade, Mont., August 14, 2009.

enough slots statewide for the new Medicaid patients, as well as for uninsured people who might end up buying health insurance through the new "insurance exchange" to be operated by the state beginning in 2014.

But there may be pockets of the state without enough doctors, he says. And Eagleson says state government needs to work to expand Medicaid patients' access to specialty doctors.

Toby Basil wishes she wouldn't have to wait until 2014 for Medicaid. Unemployed, living with a friend and suffering from degenerative spinal disk disease, the 47-year-old Springfield woman likely would qualify for Medicaid but now has only limited medical benefits from Capital Township that will expire after June.

A former customer service representative for a telephone company, Basil owes thousands of dollars in medical bills and can't afford the \$1,000 to get her wheelchair repaired. "My anxiety level would be less if I weren't worried about the bills in collections," she says.

In the short term, the state this year will receive federal money to offer uninsured people with pre-existing conditions cheaper premiums than had been offered in the past through the Illinois Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan, says Michael McRaith, director of the Illinois Department of Insurance.

Illinoisans also will benefit when the federal law gives the state insurance department new regulatory powers to

review and potentially reject "unreasonable" health insurance rate increases beginning this year, McRaith says.

"As a public policy matter, to assure that small businesses and individuals struggling to pay premiums get value for the premiums they pay, that's a significant improvement," he says.

Officials from the state's largest private insurer, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois, have had no comment on the reform law. Jeff Ingram, chief executive officer of Urbana-based Health Alliance Medical Plans, says he has no problems with many parts of the law. But he says the federal government's penalties for individuals who refuse to get insurance — \$95 a year in 2014 and \$695 or more by 2016 — may not be enough to avoid large numbers of healthy people opting out. That could mean financial headaches for insurers who won't be able to turn away people with pre-existing conditions, he says.

Regardless, supporters of the reforms say insurance companies will receive a windfall from the expanded access to coverage. But Ingram says, "It's hard for me to see, with all these government regulations, us making more money."

Wheaton resident Linda Cherrington, 60, says she hopes the new 35 percent tax credit for small businesses, as well as the future insurance exchange, makes insurance more affordable for her family's residential remodeling company. Premiums for the company have risen 355 percent over the past 10 years.



President Barack Obama embraces Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, left, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi after signing the health insurance reform bill in the White House.

"I wanted more in the bill, but I'm glad something's being done," she says.

Most business groups, including the Illinois Chamber of Commerce, opposed the legislation and continue to have concerns about many parts, including the employer penalties for not offering certain levels of insurance, the limited subsidies for small businesses and the lack of tort reform.

"It just does not address bending the cost curve in the way we hoped it would," says Laura Minzer, executive director of the chamber's health care council. "Yes, it will increase coverage significantly, which we do support."

The law isn't expected to have a major impact on existing health plans, although experts say most health plans, except those that are self-insured, eventually would be subject to certain minimum benefits standards.

Several large Illinois-based employers, including Caterpillar Inc. and John Deere, have reported hits to their earnings because the law reduces federal subsidies to companies providing prescription-drug benefits to retirees, raising the possibility of private benefits reductions to those people in the future and the prospect of those retirees entering the Medicare Part D program.

Provisions in the law that are designed to make health care more efficient could mean fewer headaches during labor negotiations about rising health costs,

says Hank Scheff, director of employee benefits for Council 31 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

The law's new tax on so-called "Cadillac" health plans won't take effect until 2018, and Scheff says unions will work with employers to make plans more efficient so they don't qualify for the tax. He adds that the health plans covering state employees aren't expected to be subject to the tax.

Many details about the insurance exchange are unknown, though tax credits and subsidies would be available to households earning up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level, or up to \$88,200 a year for a family of four. The sliding scale of credits will be designed to limit a family's total premium to between 2 percent and 9.5 percent of income, and subsidies will be designed to offset other out-of-pocket costs, though exact details haven't been worked out.

The Illinois Hospital Association supports the legislation because it will give about 1 million Illinoisans coverage over the next 10 years, association president Maryjane Wurth says.

In theory, she says, the \$8 billion in Medicare funding that Illinois hospitals won't receive over the next 10 years — as the law trims previously scheduled Medicare rate increases — will be offset by rising numbers of insured patients. But

she says the financial hits to hospitals are "front-loaded" to begin in 2010, while the benefits hospitals may see won't be fully realized until later.

"We're concerned about the stability of the Illinois market," she says.

Wayne Lerner, chief executive officer of Holy Cross Hospital on Chicago's southwest side, has the same concerns but says the hospital expects in 10 years to spend \$6 million to \$9 million less on uncompensated care. It spends \$30 million of its \$100 million annual budget on the uninsured now.

The law's increased payments for primary care services through Medicaid and Medicare will help persuade more doctors to enter primary care rather than other specialties that traditionally pay higher salaries, says Dr. Janet Albers, a family physician at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine. Primary care doctors are needed more than ever as the health care system changes, she says.

Springfield resident Tina Lathan's sister, Verta Wells, didn't survive to see the reform law passed. Wells, a former Springfield waitress, died July 2 at age 41 of breast cancer that she beat once but which had returned and spread to her brain, bones and other organs. She had delayed getting care to detect the return of that cancer when she was uninsured and feared high out-of-pocket costs.

Wells was one of the thousands of uninsured Americans who die prematurely each year because of their inability to obtain health insurance. Durbin, who learned about her situation, told her story on the floor of the U.S. Senate in December.

Lathan, 45, says she can understand how upper-income people subject to the law's increased Medicare taxes might oppose it, but she hopes that her sister's three sons — all young adults and all uninsured — benefit from the reforms.

"My 'Verta bird' is still soaring," Lathan says. "She's not here, but she still has an impact."

Fraas, the heart transplant patient from Elgin, says the flaws in the law are worth the beginning it marks in changing a flawed health care system. "At least something is happening," he says. "I don't think the work will ever be done." □

Dean Olsen is the medical/health reporter at the State-Journal Register in Springfield.

The governor's race

Gov. Pat Quinn and state Sen. Bill Brady stand in stark contrast. Quinn is backing a 1 percentage point increase in the state income tax, while Brady is calling for \$1 billion in tax cuts. Quinn happily describes himself as "progressive" while Brady's voting record paints a legislator who is about as conservative on social issues as one can get.

"In a normal race, Brady and [GOP lieutenant governor candidate Jason] Plummer are the most conservative candidates that the Republican Party has run in recent memory. But conversely, Quinn and [Democratic lieutenant governor candidate] Sheila Simon are the most liberal ticket ... in recent memory," says Kent Redfield, a professor emeritus in political science at the University of Illinois Springfield.

Yet going into the general election, Quinn and Brady have more in common politically than expected. Both narrowly won their primaries and have faced some stumbles early in their campaigns. Both are in danger of alienating voting blocs that their parties have historically needed to win the governor's seat.

"There is a sense in which they are both accidental candidates. ... Neither one of them is typical in terms of the nominees that end up running in the general elections," Redfield says. He adds that the election could ultimately come down to "which one has the steeper learning curve."

Jamey Dmn, Capitol bureau chief for Illinois Issues, interviewed both major party candidates about their campaigns. Other governor candidates will be included in future articles. Here are condensed, edited transcripts of Quinn's and Brady's responses to her questions.

Gov. Pat Quinn

Q. Experts predict this will be a difficult election year for incumbents and Democrats nationwide. How do you plan to energize your base?



Gov. Pat Quinn

I think the issues I believe in are the issues the people of Illinois believe in — education, and related to education is jobs. I think I am the candidate who is best supporting education in our state. I have the best plan to get new jobs in Illinois and preserve the current jobs we have.

We've been rocked by a national recession. It caused great havoc in the American economy, including our own. This year we are going to be doing many, many job initiatives that bring new jobs to Illinois. We have to see this as an economic emergency. The governor has to do everything possible to help our economy. I think education and job initiatives are the way to do it.

Q. Are you concerned that you may lose unions' support after passing pension reforms?

No. I think the workers of Illinois understand that we have to reform the public pension system in our state. And that's what we did. It was a landmark reform.

If we didn't do that, the systems themselves would implode. They would be insolvent. We have to have a decent pension for those who teach and work in state government. But by making these



Sen. Bill Brady

reforms, we help protect not only the pension systems but also adequate funding for health and education for our whole state, which would be eclipsed by ever-growing public pension requirements and costs that we couldn't afford.

I think the rank-and-file members of unions understand that you've got to have fortitude and make decisions that are for the common good. We've had two governors before me who didn't do that. I think the most important role of a governor is to be honest before and after elections. And that's what I've tried to do all my life.

Q. With the corruption trial of your predecessor starting soon, how will you handle the connections that your opponents will undoubtedly draw between you and former Gov. Rod Blagojevich?

I ran in 2002 in the primary for lieutenant governor. Rod Blagojevich didn't support me at all. I won on my own, and that's what I have always been — on my own. I'm an independent Democrat. I disagreed with my predecessor on numerous occasions, particularly in the area of utilities and taxes. I didn't agree with the gross receipts tax, and another

one we disagreed on was recall. I'm the one who led the effort both in 2008 and in 2009 that finally got a recall amendment on the Illinois ballot this November. I am going to be campaigning for that up and down the state.

People know me. I have been doing this for 35 years. I think I have been a very good governor, particularly in the area of integrity. We have put in place an honest government and an honest governor. So if my opponents want to make an issue out of integrity, lots of luck. I think the voters know they have an honest governor.

Q. It looks as if the 1 percent-age point tax increase you proposed may not pass before the general election. If not, do you plan to make it a campaign issue? If you lost the election, would you still push for a tax increase as you finished out your term?

There are some tough decisions I have to make. I am sure it would be easy to say 'no new taxes.' Well, the problem is, we wouldn't have the proper amount of money invested in education. We have to have that if we're going to have a good state.

I think it is much better to be straightforward and honest before an election. Go to the voters and say: Here's our situation. I inherited a multibillion-dollar deficit. I didn't create it. But the honest way to go about things is to balance the budget. If we have to raise revenue in a fair way to do so, then that's what we should do. There will be a lot of people who say things that sound good — if you say them fast — running for governor this year. I would advise the voters to look at the fine print. The bottom line is, the plans of my opponents are blank pieces of paper when it comes to actually balancing the budget. I made it clear from day one that we're not going to engage in the kind of practices that occurred before I came along, where information was really kept from the public regarding Illinois' financial state.

Q. You won in a fairly close primary. Some of the same issues, such as the "Meritorious Good Time Push" program for prison inmates, will likely come up in the general election. What lessons did you learn from the primary that you will apply to the general election?

When I learned about that program, I immediately suspended it. I brought in people to watch over the system to make sure everything was done according to what I wanted.

It wasn't done the way I wanted it. I think chief executives, when they see something not going the right way, they immediately take action. That's what I've done.

I had no illusions that the primary would be easy or anything other than close. But I won the primary. And, I'm going to win the general election based on a principled position of making sure we pay our bills in Illinois, invest in education and have an honest governor and an honest government.

Sen. Bill Brady

Q. Critics have called on you to give a comprehensive budget proposal. Other organizations, such as the Civic Federation and the Illinois Policy Institute, have presented detailed plans. In the middle of a financial crisis, don't you owe it to voters to give them some specifics?

I have been very specific, in a macro sense, that I will balance the budget in the first year. That means I have to reduce spending by at least 10 percent. There are no sacred cows. Every area of state government is going to have to rid itself of waste, mismanagement, abuse and potentially fraud. I don't have the resources that I'll have during an audit to see exactly what that is.

The real solution is to live within our means and rebuild our economy. We've got to make Illinois a competitive place

to live, work and do business, and that will solve our problems. I think all of the ideas that the Policy Institute, the Civic Committee, the Civic Federation, the *Tribune* have outlined provide a blueprint to start reconciling spending within our means. Every one of them needs to be fully examined. I don't have the governor's budget staff, but common sense tells me that we've got to live within our means. We've got to pay our bills on time.

Q. A lack of resources is the reason for you not putting out a more detailed plan?

To delve deep into it, it's not resources in terms of money or people. It's resources in terms of access to information. Gov. Quinn won't tell us who we owe money to. His transparency is typical of the machine politician.

Q. Your strategy in the primary was to get out the Republican base. Some have said you are too conservative to connect with independents and suburban voters. How do you plan to reach out to more moderate voters who may not agree with your views on social issues, such as abortion and civil unions?

What people are looking for is a businessman who's a fiscal conservative. That's the kind of conservative they are looking for today. Their No. 1 concern is, "Am I going to keep my job?"

As important as the social issues are to people, it's not their focus. People respect that someone may differ with them, but right now, the focus is about the economy, jobs and living within our means. People frankly don't think they've got the luxury right now of debating social issues. This is about the fiscal issues.

I am what I am. I believe in what I believe. I think many people in Illinois share my views. There are those that don't. I respect their opinion. Where we have very common ground is, I don't know that I have run across hardly any-

body who thinks a tax increase is the solution to Illinois' problem.

Q. *But you brought up the issue of amending the Illinois Constitution to ban civil unions shortly after winning the primary. Do you regret the timing of that?*

That wasn't a campaign issue. I am a state senator. I have a number of people in my Senate district who believe that marriage should be a protected institution between a man and a woman. As a state senator, I committed to them that I would file that constitutional amendment.

Q. *You are calling for \$1 billion in tax cuts. Do you think the state can afford that when it is facing a \$13 billion deficit?*

Let's say you owned a major league baseball team, and you were only selling half the seats in your stadium.

Would you raise the price? No. You could actually drive in more revenues if you fill it at 20 percent less the cost. Illinois' price is too high. We're pushing people out of the state. If we reduce the price, we keep jobs and people. We'll have more revenues.

The gas tax is a typical example. We're one of the few states in the nation that has a double tax on gasoline. It makes gasoline too expensive. If you're within 30 miles of a bordering state, you're going to drive over there to buy your gasoline, but you don't just buy gasoline. You consume other products. We lose the sales taxes associated with those things. The employment taxes associated with the jobs. The property tax associated with the building. We lose.

Sales tax on gasoline is about a third of the cuts. Estate tax penalty is about a third of it, and about a third of it is taxes and fees. The fundamentals of what makes it affordable to be in Illinois are based on taxes and fees, regulation and litigation. □

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Higher standards

Illinois education leaders favor adoption of new national education goals

by Maura Kelly Lannan

All public school students would be expected to learn the same concepts and skills in math and English under a proposed set of national academic standards, an idea that proponents say is necessary and critics say doesn't go far enough.

A group of math and English language arts experts, convened by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, released in March a draft form of the proposed Common Core State Standards Initiative for students in kindergarten through grade 12. A final version of the standards is expected to be released in late spring.

Illinois is one of 48 states, along with the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, that helped develop the standards and hopes to adopt them after they are final. Illinois Superintendent of Schools Christopher Koch, who has been pushing for a national set of standards, says Illinois' current educational standards are overly broad and include too much material for teachers to cover each year. They were last updated in 1997, which is too long ago, he says.

"We have the goal of fewer, higher and clearer standards," Koch says of the national standards. If they were adopted in Illinois, the national standards would affect about 2.1 million students in 869 districts and 4,326 schools.

Supporters of the national standards praise the initiative, saying it is necessary to keep high school graduates

competitive in the workforce and out of remedial courses when they attend college. The Alliance for Excellent Education, a national organization that works to ensure high school graduates are ready for college, cited a 2004 study by the National Center for Education Statistics that found 42 percent of freshmen in two-year public colleges and 20 percent of freshmen in four-year public colleges took at least one remedial course in fall 2000.

"If it's becoming more and more important that graduating students are college- and career-ready, and they go to college and end up in remedial classes, that tells us we have a problem with our expectations," says Dane Linn, education division director at the National Governors Association, who oversaw the standards project. "We have a problem with the standards that are currently in place and the assessments that are in place to measure those standards."

The proposed national standards have been compared to those in other countries because high school graduates are more likely to face international competition today, supporters say.

"We felt it was important to talk about internationally benchmarked common standards so our students can be competitive," Koch says.

Common standards also can help ensure smooth transitions for students who move from one state to another, say leaders in the standards project, as well

as in the Illinois Parent Teacher Association and the National PTA. Currently, each state has its own set of educational standards and tests.

"In a world where families are moving and expectations and jobs are no longer bound by state borders, it doesn't make sense to have those disparate standards," said Gene Wilhoit, executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers, a national group that represents state school superintendents.

During the 2008-2009 school year, 13.5 percent of Illinois public school students either moved out of state or to another district in Illinois, says Matt Vanover, spokesman for the Illinois State Board of Education.

Adoption of the proposed national standards would be voluntary for states, which could also change up to 15 percent of the goals. As of late April, Kentucky was the only state to officially accept the standards while they were still in draft form.

Proponents of the national standards hope enough states adopt them so that common tests can be developed to measure and compare students' achievement. Common testing also might help states save money by eliminating the need to develop their own exams, supporters say.

Leaders of some states, such as Massachusetts, say they already have high educational standards and will not adopt the national ones if they are lower than those that exist in the state. Some observers of

the effort think most states would benefit from the common standards.

"Our suspicion is that for the vast majority of states, it's going to be a no-brainer that these standards are going to be better than what they've got now," says Michael Petrilli, vice president for national programs and policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a nonprofit educational policy group that has been tracking the development of the standards. "Most state standards are abysmal; they're vague; they're not very rigorous; and they have a lot of silliness lurking within them."

Michael Cohen, president of Achieve Inc., a nonprofit education reform group that is working on the national standards project, says most states "are aiming too low, not too high."

"By moving to common standards, that's leveling up, and that's the right way to do it," says Cohen, who was a former assistant secretary for elementary

and secondary education during former President Bill Clinton's administration.

Petrilli criticizes Illinois for reducing the passing score on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test for eighth-grade math in 2006. He says that move made the test easier to pass, and test scores improved as a result.

"Illinois has not been a poster child for rigorous (performance) standards in the past. It's been one of those states that's been willing to set the bar very low, even lower with No Child Left Behind, because they didn't want to make their schools look bad," Petrilli says.

Vanover says the state reduced the passing score to make it consistent with the scores for the math tests that students in grades 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 take. Those passing scores were lower, so the state dropped the eighth-grade math score to match it, he says.

The eighth-grade math scores went up that year, Vanover says, but he adds that

scores increased that year for all grades taking the reading and math test. He speculates that a different test format that year — changing from black and white to color and more graphics — might have contributed to the higher scores.

Illinois' test scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a test given to some public school students across the country, mirror the national average in all grade levels, Vanover says.

The proposed national standards include skills and concepts that students should acquire each year in school, but they do not outline a national curriculum.

"That would intrude on the teacher's ability to make decisions about what tools and resources to use to help students meet the standards," Linn says.

Critics say the national standards don't focus enough on academics, favoring





Hollis Consolidated Grade School student Parker Richmond gives State Superintendent Christopher Koch a tour of the school.

instead an approach that teaches life skills such as how to apply academic knowledge to situations.

"Those kinds of skills are nice to have, but the students that do well academically need to have the foundational building blocks in English and mathematics first," says Jamie Gass, director of the Center for School Reform at the Pioneer Institute, a Boston-based nonprofit group that has compared the proposed standards with Massachusetts' existing ones and determined that the state's standards are stronger.

Wilhoit disagrees, saying students should know how to apply what they learn.

"What we're concerned about is both what they know in mathematics and how they can perform if given a real life issue, a challenge, and how they would go back on their mathematics knowledge to solve that challenge," he says. "To me, I don't see this as a dichotomy. It's not either content or skills. It is both."

The proposed national standards are

designed so that students' knowledge in math and English grows each year and builds upon the skills acquired from the previous year. The English language arts standards cover reading, writing, speaking, listening and language.

Under the proposed English standards, for example, fourth-graders would be expected to explain major differences between poems and prose and refer to the structural elements of poems such as stanza, verse and rhythm. In fifth grade, those same students would be expected to explain major differences between drama and prose stories. They also should be able to refer to the structural elements of drama, such as cast of characters, setting descriptions, dialogue, stage directions, acts and scenes, when writing or speaking about specific works of dramatic literature.

The English standards would have kindergartners through fifth-graders reading stories, drama, poetry and informational texts, while students in grades six through 12 would read fiction, poet-

ry, drama and nonfiction, such as speeches, essays and historical documents.

The proposed math standards, for example, would have third-graders develop an understanding of multiplication and division, as well as fractions. They also would work with numbers up to 10,000. By fourth grade, the national standards would have those same students work with numbers up to 100,000 and continue solving problems using multiplication, division and fractions. They also would start to work with decimals.

"The writers worked hard, we worked hard, and I think it's a good product that came out," says Christine Fransen, a math teacher at Chicago's Nicholas Senn High School who served on a committee to review the math standards after they were written. "There might be a little more tweaking that's needed but not much."

Sandra Stotsky, a member of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and

Secondary Education and a former education official in that state who oversaw the revision of its academic standards about 10 years ago, says the proposed national English standards are too vague and generic. She suggests the standards include more direction for teachers, such as offering a broad list of authors or kinds of texts that students should read at different grade levels.

"There's no direction. You've just got skills," she says. Most standards should be considered a curriculum framework, she says, but she believes the proposed national ones fall short of that goal.

She points to a vocabulary section of the English language standards and notes that from grades six through 12, a section on understanding word relationships is the same from year to year and shows no progression for students' learning.

It would have those students "trace the network of uses and meanings different words have and the interrelationships among those meanings and uses," and "distinguish a word from other words with similar denotations but different connotations."

"It's a lot of high-flown verbiage," Stotsky says. "No one has bothered to edit it to make it make sense."

The vocabulary standards would be improved if they outlined types or categories of words to be studied each year, such as synonyms or idioms, she says.

Petrilli says his group reviewed the draft standards and gave the math section a grade of A- and the English language arts section a grade of B.

"We think they're pretty good," he says.

Petrilli dismisses the criticisms that there is too much focus on life skills and not enough direction for teachers.

"There's a lot of good, solid, traditional academic content in this," he says. He points to the English standards' appendix, which suggests readings appropriate for various grades that can guide teachers in choosing what to assign.

While states' adoption of the national standards is voluntary, those that do so by August 2 will get 20 additional points toward their applications for school improvement money from the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top initiative. States that signed on to the project to develop the standards will

receive another 20 points toward those applications.

Texas and Alaska are the only two states that did not sign on to develop the standards.

"We felt that it might imply to the Alaskan people that we were already agreeing to adopt the standards, and prior to this, of course, it was always up to Alaskans to decide what the standards were," says Eric Fry, spokesman for the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. However, he says Alaska officials have been monitoring the project and will consider the final standards after they are released.

DeEtta Culbertson, spokeswoman for the Texas Education Agency, says Texas is not interested in adopting the national standards because the state believes its standards are stronger, and it would cost too much money to make the switch.

"We feel it's best for Texans to determine what Texas students should learn," she adds.

Massachusetts, the state many involved in writing the standards point to as having high educational standards, also will consider the final version, says Jeff Nellhaus, deputy commissioner of that state's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

"We're hopeful that the completed documents will meet the standards that we're looking for in terms of comprehensiveness and clarity and other factors," Nellhaus says. "At the end of the day, if analysis indicates that they're significantly different and lower than what we have in hand, we don't want to take a step backward, obviously."

Kentucky educators voted to accept the draft standards in February and plan to implement the final version of the standards this fall, says Lisa Gross, spokeswoman for the Kentucky Department of Education. The state acted early because it was time to reassess its standards, and it liked the national ones because they offer more in-depth instruction on topics.

"The teachers won't feel as if they have to skim quickly through this laundry list of standards," she says. "They'll be able to spend more time on things."

Koch says he hopes the Illinois State Board of Education votes to adopt the national standards as an emergency rule

***"Most state standards are
abysmal; they're vague;
they're not very rigorous; and
they have a lot of silliness
lurking within them."***

***Michael Petrilli,
Thomas B. Fordham
Institute***

first so the state meets the August 2 deadline to earn extra points for its Race to the Top application.

That emergency rule would last 150 days, after which the standards would be open to public comment and have to be permanently adopted by the General Assembly's Joint Committee on Administrative Rules, he says.

Koch hopes the state could fully implement the new standards and have new tests in place by 2013.

The cost to adopt these standards is hard to determine, Koch says. Illinois is seeking about \$400 million in federal funds from the Race to the Top program, some of which would be used to train teachers in the new standards, he says. He hopes the state also would save money by sharing resources with other states that adopt the new standards and developing common tests to measure students' achievement.

If Illinois does not win Race to the Top funds, Koch says he doesn't think he will find money for teacher training for new standards elsewhere from the state, which he says is expecting thousands of teacher layoffs.

Koch says Illinois won't have to eliminate all of its current standards if it adopts the national ones.

"There's a lot of our standards that were good and will be part of the internationally benchmarked standards," Koch says. "We're not necessarily starting from scratch." □

Maura Kelly Lannan is a Washington, D.C.-based free-lance writer who previously covered government for the Associated Press in Illinois.

Rural relief

Federal stimulus money sent to smaller towns creates jobs that have an immediate impact on local economies

by Beverley Scobell

This year, the town of La Harpe in western Illinois will celebrate more than its annual SummerFest. An Iowa company this month breaks ground on the east side of town for a new biofuels plant, creating jobs for some of La Harpe's 1,385 residents.

Bio-NRG chose to build its facility in Hancock County primarily because of incentives funded by the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, also called the economic stimulus plan. The company received \$33,750 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and \$1 million funneled through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Bio-NRG expects to hire 30 people when the plant begins to process soybean oil next year.

This is welcome news for a town with higher than 11 percent unemployment and a median family income of less than \$38,000.

"Thirty jobs to some people doesn't seem like a lot," U.S. 17th District Rep. Phil Hare, Democrat of Rock Island, said to those attending a La Harpe community meeting announcing the grants. "But [when] you're at 11.1 percent unemployment, three jobs is a lot. Thirty jobs is wonderful."

As the company expands, it will continue to create new jobs, says president and CEO Jon Hall. In addition, the biofuels plant will buy most of the six million

bushels of soybeans for feedstock from Illinois farmers. Hall says economic impact studies predict the biofuels plant will "jump the base" — the price farmers get for their soybeans — about 10 cents to 15 cents a bushel.

For many smaller communities, the federal stimulus money can be a turning point for future economic growth. Though most of the ARRA money ends up in Springfield or Chicago, the grants and loans going to smaller projects in rural Illinois create jobs that have an immediate impact on local economies.

"In our case, the stimulus is doing what it's supposed to do. The project here is supporting jobs," says Canton Mayor Kevin Meade.

In April, Cook Medical Inc. opened its doors in this Fulton County town of 15,000 with 30 new employees. The manufacturer of medical devices built the new facility on 10 acres of a reclaimed brownfield site. Meade says that in the next couple of years, the company plans to ramp up production to eventually create 300 new jobs.

A year ago, Canton received \$1.6 million in ARRA funds from the U.S. Commerce Department to build infrastructure — roads, water, sewer — throughout the 30-acre site that once housed an International Harvester plant. The farm implement manufacturer had employed 3,000 people in the area. When it closed in

1983, the unemployment rate rose to nearly 20 percent. Since then, Meade says the community has been "holding on," relying on "tough pioneer spirit" to complete the work necessary to entice a company such as Cook Medical.

Now, Meade can quote a Commerce Department report that predicts close to 1,000 jobs and several million dollars in economic impact will spin off from the investment.

Most of the ARRA money funnels through congressional offices to state agencies and large-city projects. The top Illinois recipients for the quarter ending March 31 were the Chicago Board of Education, the Illinois Department of Transportation, the city of Chicago, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the Chicago Transit Authority. Transportation, school and environmental infrastructure projects account for most of the jobs created or saved, according to *recovery.gov*, the website tracking stimulus spending and consequent jobs saved or created.

The government reports that from February 2009 through the first quarter of 2010 ending March 31, Illinois had been awarded more than \$8.2 billion in contracts, grants and loans, with about \$3.8 billion having been received. The federal government credits Illinois with creating or saving nearly 65,000 jobs.

A few of those are in Rockford, not one of the state's smallest towns but one of the hardest hit by unemployment, with a rate of nearly 18 percent in March, as reported by the Illinois Department of Employment Security. In January, the unemployment rate in Boone and Winnebago counties was 19.7 percent, up 5.8 percentage points from a year earlier. That is closing in on the 1983 rate — a national high at the time — when that recession eroded the manufacturing base and one in four workers had no job.

Statewide, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for January was 11.3 percent, the highest level since August 1983. The Illinois Department of Employment Security reported in March that since the recession began in December 2007, the nation lost 8.4 million jobs and Illinois lost 407,000.

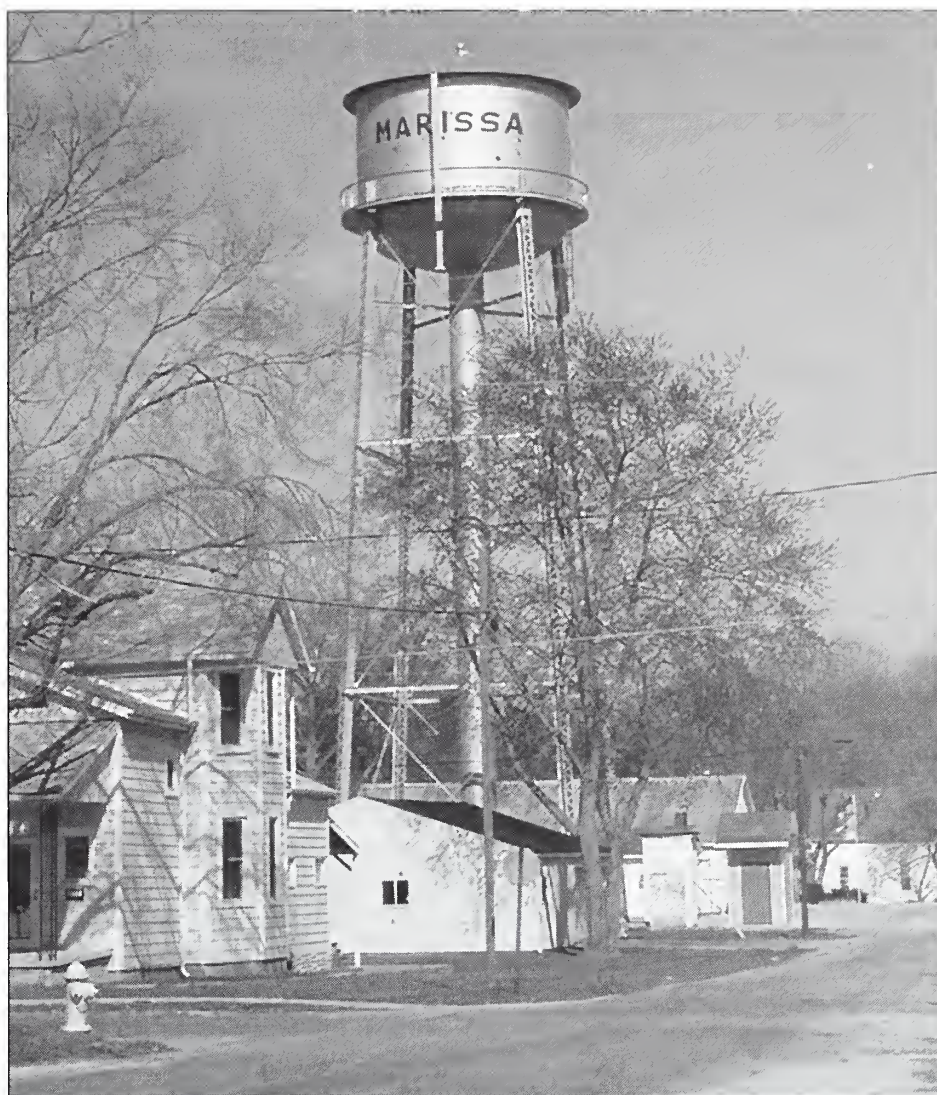
Ingersoll Machine Tools Inc., which can trace its history in Rockford to 1891, was awarded \$5 million in ARRA funds to retool some of its aviation-industry technology to wind-turbine components, which will help create 87 jobs and retain 69 jobs.

"This is an opportunity [for the company] to get heavier into the wind area," says Sen. Dave Syverson, Republican of Rockford.

Wind energy accounts for about 3 percent of power generation in Illinois, which ranks third nationwide behind Texas and Colorado. Illinois officials report wind generation has attracted more than \$1.3 billion in investment in the state and has created more than 3,500 jobs. More than \$100 million in federal recovery funding is available to implement the state's Energy Plan, administered by the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, one of the state agencies that disburse the stimulus funds and helped with the grant to Ingersoll.

"This is a small step in putting some of those dollars into real manufacturing and helping create good high-paying manufacturing jobs," Syverson says.

Syverson is critical of the federal program for such projects as the \$400 direct grants to families, who, he says, were expected to spend it on retail, which he calls a one-time shot.



The town of Marissa in St. Clair County received \$2.2 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act money to improve its deteriorating water and sewer systems.

"If the federal government understood stimulus, it would take more dollars and put them into programs that create real jobs," he says. "Manufacturing and construction create a large number of industry jobs, and dollars spent on manufacturing and construction are dollars spent many times over."

In southern Illinois, an old-source power project is creating jobs with private funds, but federal money is replacing worn-out infrastructure in nearby communities. Local leaders and business owners hope to attract some of the 3,000 people working at the new coal-fired facility and adjacent mine being built in Washington County. When completed, the Prairie State Energy Campus will generate enough electricity to serve

about 2.5 million families in nine states.

"It's really been a godsend for this area," says Rep. Dan Reitz, Democrat of Steeleville. "It has propped up the housing market ... and is pumping \$40,000 or more a month into the economy" from renters at the World Shooting and Recreational Complex in Sparta.

Work is also progressing on cleaning out the Kaskaskia River to allow coal barges to reach the mine. More than \$18 million in ARRA funding has been awarded to dredge the river from New Athens to Fayetteville, along with other local Corps of Engineers projects that will expand recreation acres.

Creating and keeping jobs are "vitally important" in the current economy, Reitz says, but the federal money going to rural

ARRA Illinois projects by the numbers

\$8.1	billion total granted
\$3.8	billion received
7,465	total awards
6,562	grants
27	loans
876	contracts
\$935	million to the Chicago Board of Education
\$899.5	million to the Illinois Department of Transportation
\$335	million to the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
\$249	million to the Chicago Transit Authority



communities often works as a shot in the arm that promotes more economic development. He says stimulus-funded road and bridge repair projects in Steeleville and Sparta make those communities more accessible. And the town of Marissa in St. Clair County received an \$815,000 grant and a \$1.38 million loan through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of Rural Development to improve its deteriorating water and sewer systems.

"Marissa is in a prime spot between the mine and the [world shooting] park," Reitz says. He expects about 500 permanent jobs will remain after the mine complex is built. The infrastructure pro-

ject in Marissa "will definitely help attract more residents. It will make the water cleaner, and it will create jobs."

Federal stimulus money is funneled through congressional offices. In Illinois, the top five congressional districts to receive funds through March 31 are, in order of amount, rounded: Democratic Rep. Danny Davis' 7th District, \$2.3 billion; Republican Rep. Aaron Schock's 18th District, \$716 million; Republican Rep. John Shimkus' 19th District, \$581 million; Democratic Rep. Phil Hare's 17th District, \$455 million; and Democratic Rep. Jerry Costello's 12th District, \$455 million.

The 18th District leads recipient reported jobs October to March with 59,634. The 7th District follows with 1,925, then 660 in the 17th District, 502 in the 19th District and 428 in the 12th District.

"Rep. Schock's district houses state agencies. The State Board of Education is based in our district," says Dave Natonski, Schock's spokesman. "It looks like our district gets more. The numbers are totally misleading."

Schock and Shimkus voted against the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Neither congressman claims ARRA-funded projects on his website. Natonski says: "This office has chosen not to announce any projects because people in the district are on the hook for this funding. They are paying for it."

One popular stimulus project covering most of the area represented by Shimkus and Costello extends broadband Internet connections in southern Illinois. The USDA awarded more than \$14 million in loans and more than \$8 million in grants to set up a fiber-optic network in 24 counties.

Illinois was one of eight states to receive a portion of the most recent round of ARRA funding for broadband. In announcing the projects in March, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said building the network will create jobs, and the completed systems "will provide a platform" for economic growth in the future. Expanding broadband, he said, "provides a gateway for businesses and key anchor institutions — such as libraries, schools, public buildings and community centers — to provide services."

"In the 21st century economy, businesses are broadband-rich and entrepreneur-rich. That kind of connectivity is a must," says Rex Duncan, director of Community Development and Outreach at Southern Illinois University Carbondale's Office of Economic and Regional Development.

The ARRA-funded project, he says, "will change the playing field, paying dividends throughout the area."

Canton's Meade echoes the belief of many rural leaders: "In our case, [the stimulus] built roads and infrastructure to support jobs. It sets us up for future development." □

Telecom rewrite

Lawmakers unanimously approve legislation to bring regulation up to speed

by Rachel Wells

A decade ago, businesses looking for a suitable location to open their doors asked municipal leaders about water and sewer, parking and roads. Today, the chief amenity companies require is access to the latest communication technologies, says Evanston Chamber of Commerce president Jonathan Perman.

"The single most important question that we are asked is this: Are the buildings that you're going to show ... [do they] have the most reliable and affordable broadband communication and fastest broadband communication that we can possibly have?"

Lawmakers, budgeting for a state with double-digit unemployment rates, have been asking a similar question: Can Illinois compete for jobs that rely on the latest telecommunication technologies?

The business world says, "Not yet" — not until the state comes up to regulatory speed, as laid out by a measure approved unanimously by lawmakers this spring.

"No matter what industry you're in today, telecommunications is critical. Every machine that's on a shop floor runs off a computer," says Pam Cumpata, president of the McHenry County Economic Development Corporation, which works with both rural and developed areas. "The fact that in certain areas within our county we do not have the capability to run high speed broadband can be a negative impact on those manufacturers."

Both Cumpata and Perman joined business leaders from across the state urging lawmakers to modernize the Telecommu-

nications Act, a regulatory law first instituted in 1985 and last revised in 2001. The law would have sunset in 2005, but lawmakers have delayed any major action until this year (see *Illinois Issues*, May 2006, page 28).

Over that time, telecommunications technologies have changed drastically. Text messages, for instance, didn't exist in 2000, but in 2009, Americans sent 1.36 trillion such messages, according to an industry association report.

This year, however, as the legislature grappled with a \$13 billion budget deficit, some stakeholders say the lure of jobs and increased investment pushed a rewrite forward.

"This is a way to create and retain jobs in Illinois without a single dime of taxpayer money," says Paul La Schiazza, president of AT&T Illinois, a major force behind the rewrite effort. "There's no subsidies here; there's no tax credits; there's no state money being spent. This is purely good public policy that will create jobs. ... That is the single reason why this has gained traction now versus other years."

The modernization would "level the playing field," says La Schiazza, allowing the company to use more of its resources on new, more popular and profitable technologies, where its direct competitors — namely, wireless and voice-over-Internet protocol [VoIP], phone service available over a broadband connection — are not regulated at all.

Through the measure approved by lawmakers in May, AT&T would gain loos-

ened service-quality standards for its basic landline services, technically termed "plain old telephone service," and elimination of \$30 million fines for failing to meet certain requirements. The legislation also would allow companies whose landline service is currently heavily regulated to opt out of government and into market regulation where competition with VoIP and wireless providers exists. At the same time, it would assure telecommunications companies that the state won't try to regulate those newer technologies, at least until the measure sunsets in 2013.

Through deregulation, as skeptics of the rewrite's purported benefits call it, companies can accelerate broadband deployment, AT&T says. And more broadband means more jobs, proponents say.

A 7 percent increase in broadband adoption in Illinois could lead to 105,622 new or retained jobs each year, and the annual economic impact could hit about \$6.2 billion, according to a study by Connected Nation, a group whose national advisers include heads of associations for telecommunications companies, including AT&T.

House Telecommunications Committee chairman Rep. Kevin McCarthy, an Orland Park Democrat, says companies, at the very least, would take a second look before passing up Illinois for another state.

"We know that right now, we're not on the agenda for a lot of these companies that are national companies as far as coming here," McCarthy says, explaining that telecommunications companies don't want to invest here, and other businesses don't

want to be somewhere where telecommunications haven't advanced. "We don't want to be off that list completely right of the bat. We want to be on that list, so at least we know [that] if the economy continues to rebound, we'll be in the ballpark as far as saying, 'How about looking at Illinois for some of these jobs?'"

But, while proponents of the rewrite tout increased broadband investment followed by more jobs, opponents say that investment, especially outside Chicago, is not guaranteed.

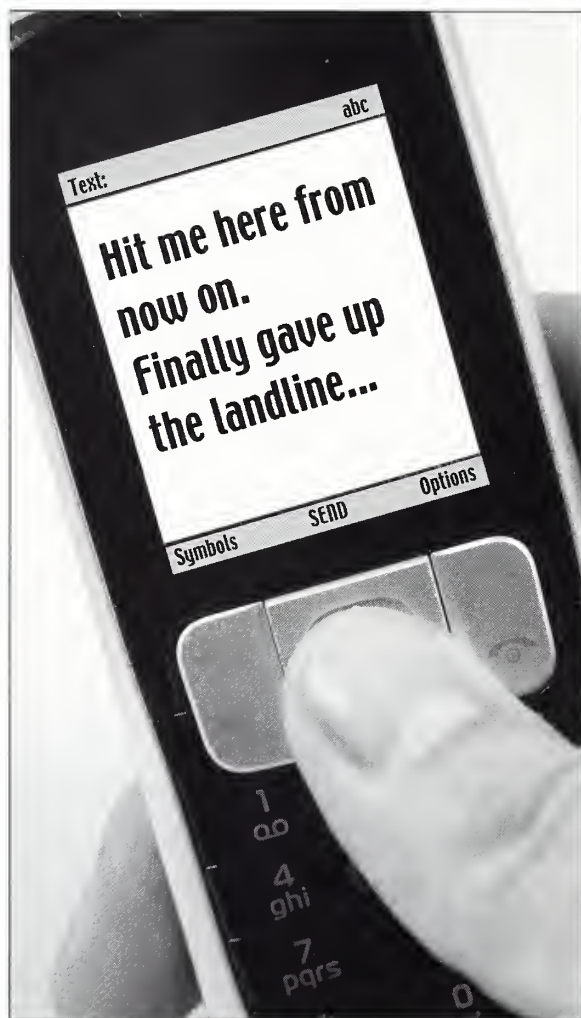
Citizens Utility Board executive director David Kolata points to an existing order from the Illinois Commerce Commission requiring AT&T to provide broadband to 90 percent of its customers. AT&T is currently appealing that order, arguing that the 90 percent figure applies to the entire state, but the Citizens Utility Board argues that it applies only to downstate. Modernization would eliminate the order entirely.

"One of the biggest concerns is that the bill is Orwellian in structure," says Kolata. "In certain parts of the state, AT&T is going to invest regardless. All this bill does is get them out of investing in places they don't want to."

AT&T and business groups compare Illinois to other, already modernized states to highlight job growth. Evansville, Ind., for example, gained 550 new AT&T jobs in 2007, after regulation modernization, according to the company.

But Kolata compares Indiana and Illinois to highlight what government involvement can do for people. Because Indiana had already given up its authority over the industry, when Frontier Communications assumed Verizon service areas in April, the state couldn't require anything of the companies, Kolata says.

"They weren't able to have any say if this transaction was in the public interest. They lost an opportunity to condition it and make sure their interests were fully represented," Kolata says. Illinois, however, was able to approve the change with the condition that the company by 2013 would bring broadband, of a specified speed, to at least 85 percent of its service area, much of which is downstate. "State



oversight can lead to good things. You give it up, you never get it back."

When it comes to service quality protections, instead of loosening requirements on old service, Kolata says Illinois should extend them to the new methods of communication, including wireless.

But proponents say competition already regulates those new forms, and consumers must be happy with those services or they wouldn't have fled their old service.

"[In the] move from landlines to wireless, [consumers] said, 'I'm comfortable doing this now. ... My price, my quality, my service is going to be as good as or better than what I had,'" says Jeff Mays, president of the Illinois Business Roundtable.

Since 2001, the number of "plain old telephone service" lines in Illinois has decreased by 26 percent, according to 2008 figures published in last year's Illinois Commerce Commission competition report. That represents a 2.3 million-line decrease, with about 7.1 million "plain old telephone service" lines still in use in Illinois as of 2008.

For AT&T, the mass migration to wireless and cable telephone service has meant a decrease, from 91 percent in 2000 to 48 percent in 2009, in the landline service it provides to households in its territories.

"The second largest telephone company in the state of Illinois is the cable company. ... That right there in and of itself is robust competition," says Rick Holzmacher with the Illinois Independent Telephone Association. While his members support modernization, he says they aren't really affected by it.

The numbers show that competition is "robust," La Schiazza says, and market regulation, instead of government regulation, is the appropriate way to ensure consumers have access to quality, affordable service.

But not all agree "robust" is an appropriate descriptor of Illinois' telecommunication competition.

Mary Patton, an AARP Illinois volunteer who testified before lawmakers at a joint committee hearing, argues that Illinois' definition of competition sets the bar too low, and where consumers only have a wire-line choice between "plain old telephone service" and cable service, true competi-

tion doesn't really exist. "The level of regulation must be appropriate to the level of competition," Patton says.

And while more than 22 percent of American households run purely on wireless telephones, according to a 2009 Center for Disease Control wireless substitution report, a large number of Illinoisans still, to some degree, rely on landline service. Lawmakers say three price-fixed, basic telephone service packages built into the modernization measure would protect those consumers, but anyone who requires more than basic service but insists on landline service would see prices as dictated by the market and competition with newer technologies.

Assistant Attorney General Susan Satter testified that the security, reliability and cost of basic landline service continue to attract consumers, especially elderly and low-income individuals. Serving those populations and developing broadband aren't mutually exclusive, she says.

"AT&T has a wire-line network. That wire-line network supports voice, supports

broadband service, supports video service. ... Whether they are service quality standards or otherwise, those obligations are strengthening the network. They are not preventing the network from developing. They are protecting the public, so that we know that we can have a reliable network in cases of emergency and for day-to-day operations," Satter says. "Telephone service, being connected one way or another, is essential. And that is the premise of the original Telecommunications Act."

Technology continues to change at a rapid pace, and even the Federal Communications Commission recommended in the 2010 National Broadband Plan that the government begin looking at a potential transition from publicly switched telephone networks, over which "plain old telephone service" is most frequently provided, to broadband-based service, as a way to ensure 100 percent broadband availability across the country.

The plan recognizes the importance of the network but points to the convergence of voice, data and video via broadband service and to consumers' exodus from the old network as a drain. The fewer cus-

tomers using the network, the more the cost to the remaining lines increases.

La Schiazza, whose company submitted testimony to and was cited in the plan, says a transition would be similar to that from analog to digital television. Before that transition, the federal government aired public service announcements and offered all households coupons for purchasing the equipment necessary to adapt their television sets. But the transition to new broadband communication services won't mean an end to wired communications, La Schiazza says.

"The infrastructure that's connected to the wires and fibers will change, but I think for a long, long period of time, wires and fiber optics will play a very, very key role. ... It's just a migration to a different [switching] technology."

In whatever form, broadband is the future, stakeholders on all sides of the rewrite — or regulation — debate seem to agree. How to ensure that everyone has access to it is less certain.

Consumer groups hope provisions in the modernization legislation requiring cable and wireless providers to report

broadband deployment would help Illinois map which areas do and do not have sufficient broadband penetration.

"One of the first steps to solving the digital divide is figuring out what's out there. Right now, that information is very hard to get," Kolata says.

But reporting requirements must balance providers' needs.

"Unless that information is confidential and proprietary, it could be used against us by our competition," says Joseph Handley, president of the Cable Television and Communications Association of Illinois. Where modernization is concerned, the association is neutral. "That's something that obviously our industry always favors."

Handley isn't alone in that view.

"When government stays out of the way, business does well for us," McCarthy says. "That's what we're going to hope, and we're going to monitor it, of course."

Mays says the bulk of consumers are now comfortable with competitive marketplace regulation. "Verizon, AT&T or the government: Who do you want to call?" □

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Mell uses engagement to point out inequity



Deborah Mell reads the announcement of her engagement to Christin Baker.

State Rep. **Deborah Mell**, a Chicago Democrat, announced her engagement to Christin Baker, her partner of nearly six years.

Mell made the announcement on the Illinois House floor in late April after proposing to Baker over dinner at the Hancock Building in Chicago. She says she would prefer to get married in Illinois, but same-sex marriage is not allowed under state law. Mell says she and Baker, who is national director of arts and humanities for YMCA USA, plan to marry in the

fall of 2011 and will have to travel to Iowa, where same-sex marriage is legal.

Legislators often make announcements in both chambers about personal landmarks in their lives, such as birthdays and births of children and grandchildren, during legislative session.

However, Mell used her announcement to address what she sees as inequity in Illinois law. "In Iowa — and four other states

and our nation's capital — we are considered equal," Mell said. "Life can be tough even on a good day. So I believe if you find that person who you want to spend the rest of your life with, regardless of if you're gay or straight, it should be honored and celebrated."

If the couple does take vows in Iowa, their marriage would not be recognized under current law as a legal union in Illinois.



Christin Baker, left, and state Rep. Deborah Mell say they will marry next fall in Iowa, where marriage of same-sex couples is legal.

Photographs courtesy of Illinois House Democrats

For more information about people see the *Illinois Issues* Web site at <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>

Gabel replaces Hamos

Robyn Gabel joined the Illinois House this spring, earlier than she had planned after winning a five-way Democratic primary race for the 18th District state representative seat.

Gabel, an Evanston resident, replaces Wilmette Democrat **Julie Hamos**, who lost a primary bid for the U.S. House but was appointed by Gov. **Pat Quinn** to head the Department of Healthcare and Family Services. Following Hamos' departure, the state Democratic Party voted Gabel into the position for the remainder of Hamos' term.

Before joining the House, Gabel served for 20 years as executive director of the nonprofit Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition, where she worked to build support for Illinois' Kid Care and All Kids health insurance programs. She has conducted research on immigrant health programs.

Gabel also served on several Illinois health care and human services advisory boards dealing with issues such as poverty, immunization, Medicaid and primary care case management.

"One of the main things I hope to accomplish is being able to implement national health care reform at the state level in the best way possible, to make sure the most number of people can get health coverage," Gabel says. She also plans to work on women's issues such as domestic violence and in the areas of mental health and disabled services "to make sure that families can be as healthy and productive as possible."

Her priorities also include job creation, which she says is possible through linking research by Illinois institutions with Illinois businesses and by taking advantage of alternative energy opportunities.



State Rep. Robyn Gabel

Gabel served as a legislative assistant to then-Chicago Ald. Luis Gutierrez, who is now a U.S. representative. She is a graduate of Beloit College, the University of Illinois and Loyola University Chicago Law School.

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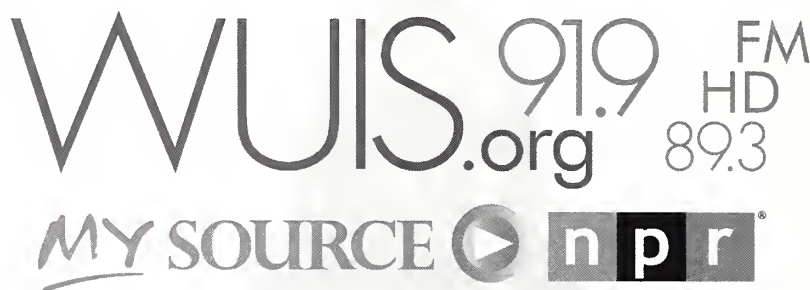
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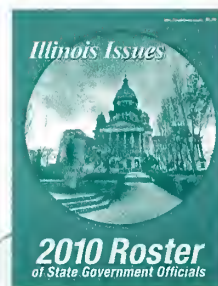
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Charles N. Wheeler III



Despite differences over state budget, lawmakers from both sides worked together on some issues

by Charles N. Wheeler III

The fiscal fiasco otherwise known as state budget-making has a lot of Illinoisans searching for descriptive terms harsh enough to fully express their disdain for state legislators.

Lawmakers left Springfield a few weeks ago without accomplishing the only chore they really needed to do before their self-imposed May 7 adjournment deadline — fashion a spending plan for the fiscal year that starts July 1.

Granted, the task was Herculean, starting as it did with a \$13 billion deficit, roughly half of the state's total operations budget for the current year. The choices were few, none pleasant: raise taxes, cut spending, borrow, or some combination thereof. Senate Democrats cobbled together a half-baked, makeshift concoction designed to get past November and the general election, then used their supermajority to push the plan through the upper chamber over Republican opposition. But the proposal stalled in the House, where every Republican and many Democrats wouldn't vote to borrow money, let alone raise taxes or cut spending.

Though Senate President John Cullerton and House Speaker Michael Madigan pledged to finish the job later, the temptation was strong to write the spring session off as governmentally obscene, as defined by the U.S. Supreme Court: "utterly without redeeming social value."

The temptation was strong to write the spring session off as governmentally obscene, as defined by the U.S. Supreme Court: "utterly without redeeming social value."

In fairness, however, if one looks beyond the breakdown over the budget, lawmakers posted some noteworthy achievements, both large and small. Only one of the 542 measures that cleared the legislature before the Mother's Day weekend exodus was an appropriations bill. **Senate Bill 1182**, approved in late April, added about \$400 million to the current budget, most of it federal stimulus money.

But on some other big issues, bipartisan majorities in both chambers overwhelmingly endorsed legislation to:

- Revamp the state's school code to bolster Illinois' chances for federal Race to the Top funds, including for the first time linking teacher and principal evaluations to student performance.

- Rewrite the law regulating landline telephone service to allow the largest provider, AT&T, to shift money into broadband and wireless technology, which the company promised would create jobs without hurting old-fashioned phone service.

- Provide a \$2,500 income tax credit to small businesses for every new hire they make in the coming budget year.

- Establish new retirement provisions for public employees hired after January 1 that would require them to work longer for smaller pensions than current workers. The slimmed-down benefits package covers all state and local employees except police and firefighters.

- Reform nursing home regulations to shift mentally disabled residents into community-based care and to raise industry safety standards overall.

- Craft exhibitor-friendly reforms at McCormick Place to rein in price-gouging that threatened Chicago with the loss of conventions and trade shows to competitors such as Orlando and Las Vegas, two cities seen as less costly and less burdened with union work rules.

While such pressing issues commanded attention, lawmakers also approved dozens of other measures intended to fix problems — some the work of previous General Assemblies — for the state's citizens.

Consider two sensible changes in election law. With no partisan rancor and only one “no” vote, lawmakers endorsed and Gov. Pat Quinn signed legislation to move the state’s primary election back to the third Tuesday in March, where it had been for 38 years, from the first Tuesday in February. Democratic and Republican leaders set the earlier date in 2007 to give Illinois voters a greater say in the 2008 presidential sweepstakes but reconsidered after an anemic turnout this February.

Moreover, the legislature also voted to require candidates for governor and lieutenant governor to run together as a ticket in primary elections. The change came in the wake of Democratic embarrassment after political unknown Scott Lee Cohen won the party’s lieutenant governor nomination, only to be pushed off the ticket when revelations surfaced about skeletons in his closet.

While the red faces all belonged to Democrats, Republicans joined in to link the two positions; the measure cleared the House 90-5 and the Senate 56-0.

Or, note a pair of environmental safety bills with bipartisan sponsorship that went to the governor with nary a dissenting vote in either chamber. One would require manufacturers to add a chemical to antifreeze that would make it taste bitter to cut down on accidental poisonings of small children and pets lured by the sweet taste of ethylene glycol. The other would ban the sale of children’s jewelry with unsafe levels of cadmium, a toxic metal that has replaced lead in some wares.

Lastly, here are two examples of bipartisan cooperation on public safety issues:

- Lead-footed drivers caught going 40 mph or more above the speed limit no longer could get court supervision, which could wipe the ticket off their driving record. Rather, they could face up to a year in jail and a \$2,500 fine, under a measure that enjoyed overwhelming support, 53-0 in the Senate and 105-3 in the House.

- A teen younger than 18 who electronically sends nude pictures of another teen could be deemed a “minor in need of supervision” and ordered to undergo

counseling and to perform community service, under another measure sent to the governor 52-0 in the Senate and 114-1 in the House. Under current law, a 17-year-old caught “sexting” would be subject to child pornography charges and required to register as a sex offender, penalties lawmakers viewed as too harsh for what many saw as youthful bad judgment.

The list could go on, but the point seems clear. Sitting lawmakers from both parties can cooperate to fashion worthwhile legislation that serves their constituents, as legislators have done for generations. If the state’s budget crisis is to be met, its political leadership, from the top echelon down to the last rank-and-file member, will have to put the public’s interest above partisan gain and work together to craft a solution, just as Democrats and Republicans in both chambers have done so admirably on so many other issues this year. Their fellow citizens deserve no less.

Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois Springfield.

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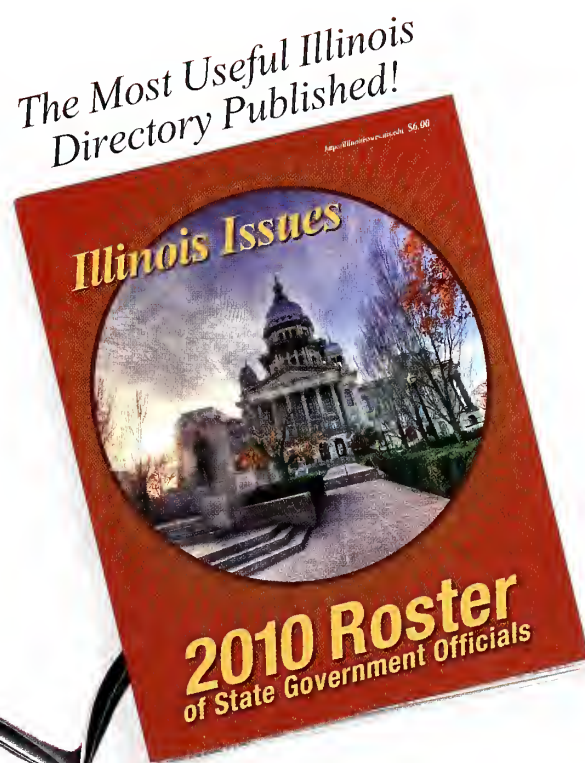
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